



## **The Hallway**

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Perhaps you've heard the saying, "when one door closes another door opens", but no one tells us about the hallway. In this instance the hallway represents the journey, a journey that starts from the first moment a parent or family member is told their child is hard of hearing or deaf.

When our two children were diagnosed ten years ago, we were shocked. We didn't know what to do, after all, no one in our family had a hearing loss. So to help gain information I talked to just about everyone who crossed my path, really, at the park, in the Super Market, over the phone, anywhere. And what I soon found out was that there weren't many people who knew specifics of supporting parents and a child with a hearing loss. Locating a "front door" to services was near impossible in our area mostly because I didn't know what to ask, as it was, I barely could remember what the audiologist rattled off to me at our appointment, "Bilateral sensory neural hearing loss. What?"

When I finally had my first conversation with another parent I was over the moon and even though our experiences were different, she told me "Be the best advocate for your child and trust your gut."

Shortly thereafter I was introduced to a parent support program that was housed in a local early intervention center where our daughter attended. This is where I could finally express myself to other parents, learn about resources and most importantly felt heard and understood for the first time in many months. No longer did I feel isolated, I soon found acceptance and validation from other parents that enabled me to take the next steps to help our children.

We soon learned that the success of our children lay within our hands as involved parents. Yet, learning new information in a very short period of time along with balancing other parts of our lives was also very stressful for my husband and I. In the PBS documentary, "Stress-A Portrait of a Killer" parents of children with disabilities were studied and found to be some of the most stressed out beings on this planet. It was found that with long periods and high levels of stress that the ends of the DNA strand actually fray and begin to unwind cutting 5 years off for every one year of these parents' lives. Thankfully, there is a natural healing to the DNA, which is found by parents supporting one another. Parent to parent support is not a nicety, it is a *necessity*.

Therefore, if I can offer anything to you on this day, it would be to reach out to others and ask for help or clarification when you need it. Stay connected if it only means signing up for a newsletter, or joining a list serve. There is so much hope for your child, the joys will far outweigh the challenges, and the hallway is a place to learn and grow.

