

Listening and Spoken Language Knowledge Center

For children and adults with hearing loss, their families and the professionals who support them



Response to Washington Post article about Nyle DiMarco

Dispelling Myths About Deafness

A recent [article](#) in the Washington Post's "The Reliable Source" column highlighted Nyle DiMarco as a deaf model, a contestant on ABC's "Dancing With the Stars," and a political activist who has established the Nyle DiMarco Foundation with a mission to promote deaf infants' access to American Sign Language (ASL). DiMarco has stated that "there are many deaf kids out there being deprived of their own language."

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell), applauds DiMarco's achievements and recognizes that ASL exists as a communication option for deaf children. However, it is just one such option and its use is declining. The reality is that most deaf children – more than 95 percent – are born to parents with typical hearing, and 90 percent of these families are choosing listening and spoken language for their deaf child, according to data from BEGINNINGS for Parents of Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in North Carolina.

For families who choose a listening and spoken language outcome, which is the majority of families, DiMarco's statements perpetuate the misconception that deaf children cannot listen and speak well. Deaf children growing up today have unprecedented opportunities to develop listening and spoken language, thanks to newborn screening, early identification and intervention, and the latest technology, such as advanced hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Given the tremendous advances in hearing technology, deaf children are able to learn spoken language by listening. Indeed, when identification and intervention with appropriate technology occur early enough, most of these children develop language much as children with typical hearing do. Recent studies show that children who solely utilize listening and spoken language, rather than a combination of this with ASL, demonstrate better listening and spoken language skills than do children who follow a combination approach, and that these children frequently develop expressive and receptive language test scores similar to their typical hearing peers.

In informing parents about communication options for their deaf children, current and emerging evidence should be considered. While bilingualism (use of ASL along with spoken language) may be helpful to deaf

children who are unable to fully achieve spoken language, a young child whose family desires spoken language often achieves their desired outcome better through a full immersion in spoken language. Moreover, the window for a deaf child to acquire listening and spoken language is much shorter than the window in which ASL can be acquired.

Deaf children frequently communicate quite well with listening and spoken language alone, and the number of children who have a need for ASL has decreased dramatically. When today's parents are told that their deaf children should or must learn ASL as part of a Deaf culture, they increasingly respond that their children actually are part of a hearing culture – that of their families, friends and the world at large. The voices of our deaf children tell the story. In videos available on AG Bell's YouTube channel, families share the remarkable abilities of deaf children today—making music, singing songs, and participating fully in sports, theater and more, with wonderful speech and remarkable hearing.

It is our hope to dispel the myths about deafness and spread the word that deaf children can hear and talk. What it means to be “deaf” has changed.

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