



# Raising Confident Teens

Support Advice for Parents



# Getting to know your teen

## Understanding the landscape your teen needs to navigate

Your child is starting to grow up and enter their teenage years. While the ages of 11 to 16 can be an exciting and transformative period, it can also be a challenging time in your child's life with myriad highs and lows.

In this guide, we share the impact hearing loss can have on the emotional and social development of teenagers and how you can help your child navigate their new social landscape. We also share how you can begin to build confidence in your child from a young age, encourage them to find their voice and arm them with the tools to be their own best advocate.

Remember, this period will be a time of exploration and discovery for you both. Be patient and you may discover that with the challenges also comes the opportunity to get to know the multi-faceted and interesting young adult your child is becoming.

Worrying about your child's happiness simply comes with the territory of being a parent, and a need to ensure that they feel socially included and build healthy peer relationships. Whether it be through academic, social, athletic or creative means, the goal is to raise confident children that find their place in the world.

Hearing loss can come with an additional layer of obstacles that teens with normal hearing do not have to contend with. Research suggests that some deaf and hard-of-hearing teens experience more peer problems and friendship challenges than their hearing peers<sup>1</sup>. Particularly, when you consider that teen communication and connection is typically formed over shared pop cultural references, social media, movies and music. All of which are heavily biased toward being able to hear.

However, on the positive side, advancements in technology are helping to slowly bridge this gap. Texting, instant messaging platforms and the wider availability of captioning has created greater opportunity for inclusion.

To be able to best support your child foster confidence and encourage self-advocacy, it is important to first understand some of the ways hearing loss may impact your child's peer relationships and social and emotional development.



## The impact hearing loss may have on teens emotionally and socially

### 1 Misunderstanding during communication

Teens with hearing loss might misunderstand when communicating with peers, teachers and other conversational partners. This can include responding incorrectly or failing to respond at all, which can lead to a breakdown in conversation<sup>2</sup>.

It's also important to remember that communication is an exchange between two people and that breakdowns in communication cannot always be attributed to the hearing loss itself.

Misunderstanding can also arise from the side of conversational partners. For example, the conversational partner may not be getting their message across clearly or in a way your child can understand.

Some signs of communication breakdown are:

- Straining to watch people's mouths intently
- Asking people to repeat themselves multiple times
- Looking puzzled
- Being unable to moderate their own voice

Acknowledging that they have hearing loss and educating others on communication repair strategies can help. However, many teenagers with hearing loss do not want to be seen as different from their peers and may find it difficult to disclose their hearing loss.

“My difficulty hearing led to a few misunderstandings. But over time, thanks to my love of chatting with people, I made many close friends.”

Sharon, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Taiwan



## 2 Impact on peer relationships

When your child starts high school, they are also entering a new social sphere where they will need to make new friends. Teenagers with normal hearing may not understand your child's hearing loss or implantable device. Sometimes, this lack of understanding can result in peers creating distance between themselves and your child. This has the potential to negatively influence the way your child responds to social situations and how they build peer relationships.

Examples of how this can manifest:

- Reduced confidence: Hesitation to meet new people and form new friendships.
- Emotional isolation: Gradually taking a step back from hearing peers.
- Physical distancing: Checking-out or avoiding social gatherings at school.

This may initially lead to feelings of loss and aloneness, lasting until they re-establish social balance. We recommend meeting with the school before your child's first day to work out a plan to mitigate these problems, such as setting up a buddy system. Encouraging extra-curricular activities can help to create bonds over shared interests, the formation of new relationships, and getting connected with recipient groups<sup>3</sup>.

“The girls used to pick on me because I was different. I felt really excluded and lonely. I was insecure for 15 years. I started to learn to accept myself through taekwondo. I have started making really good friends. I realised I shouldn't try so hard to get friends. I started to love myself for who I am and appreciate my cochlear implants.”

Nese, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Australia

## 3 Create a sense of FOMO

Fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) is not exclusive to teenagers with hearing loss. Most people, at some point, have experienced the feeling of anxiety which stems from the belief that they are missing out on the positive experiences that others are having.

However, teens with hearing loss who may be unable to engage on the same social and pragmatic levels as their peers – talking, joking, picking up on tone or social cues – might find themselves in a heightened state of FOMO. This can be a cause for concern if not addressed, because research suggests that FOMO can lead to the problematic use of social media, lower reports of contentment and greater susceptibility to peer pressure arising from the need to fit in<sup>4,5</sup>.







# Build a foundation of confidence and encourage advocacy

While your child with hearing loss will have to navigate additional challenges as they enter their teen years, there are things you can do to help support them through this period in their lives.

Emerging research is changing views on the role parents can play in helping children navigate their teen years. Traditionally seen as a time for parents to take a big step back, literature is now highlighting the importance of staying tuned in and emotionally connected<sup>3</sup>.

Teens with hearing loss typically have concerns that wearing a hearing device will single them out as being different and create anxieties about the potential judgment of their peers. It's important to arm your child with confidence and the right attitude from an early age and show them how to leverage the positive influences around them. By taking these steps, you can help them manage these concerns, minimise the effect of negative assumptions or remarks and mitigate the pressures of peer influence.

If your child is confident, with a strong sense of their identity and values, it is more likely they will be able to self-advocate and draw the line when it comes to negative peer influence<sup>6</sup>. Arguably, the most important step to help your child navigate the inevitable social and emotional challenges of being an adolescent with hearing loss, is to begin building confidence and encouraging self-advocacy from a young age.

Guiding your child through this stage and working to ensure that they reach their full potential will require some understanding, open communication and consistency. Remember, the earlier you begin these discussions with your child, the better. However, if you haven't started doing this from an early age, it's never too late to start. In the following pages are some strategies that you can begin following today.



# Building Confidence



“Allow kids to feel like they have some control over their hearing loss. I didn’t want an itinerant [hearing support] teacher early in high school – I didn’t like feeling different. But by Year 10, I asked for the support. I decided where I needed the most support. My Dad recognised that self-confidence and social skills were important for getting on with life.”

Bec, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Australia

Building confidence starts with positive and warm communication in the home. Family support can help safeguard against stress and go a long way toward building trust. Being able to confidently communicate their needs in the home environment will make it easier for your child to confidently communicate their needs outside of the home as well.

## 1 Practise active listening during conversations

In the busyness of everyday life, it’s easy to get distracted during conversations – thinking about work or what chores need to be done around the home. But when your child is trying to tell you something, it is important to pay close attention to what they are saying and feeling. By listening closely and responding with understanding, you are showing them that you care about what they have to say and positively reinforce their efforts to open up to you.

## 2 Value their opinions and foster sound decision making

From a young age, it is important that your child feels heard. Even if you don’t necessarily agree with their views, try not to shoot their ideas down too quickly.

“You might want to encourage your child to talk to you about what’s going on, but be understanding and know that they might not want to talk to Mum or Dad. That’s not a bad thing; kids need to work out for themselves when they need to ask for help.”

Bec, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Australia

Research on pre-adolescent decision making suggests that, children who know how to make sound decisions by the age of 10 or 11, tend to exhibit less anxiety, sadness and report less peer-related difficulties at ages 12 and 13<sup>7</sup>. If you disagree with your child, try to positively and calmly problem-solve together, and encourage them to think through the pros and cons by considering other viewpoints. This will go a long way toward demonstrating that you value their opinion and foster trust during communication.

## 3 Offer them space when they ask for it

Try not to take it too personally when your child is slow to communicate with you. Sometimes, it can take a bit longer for them to feel comfortable talking about what may be troubling them. Remain supportive and remind them that you are available to talk when they are ready.



## 4 Give your child responsibility

Learning to manage new responsibilities is the first step toward building independence. When they are younger, start with small responsibilities. For example, give them the responsibility of changing the batteries in their sound processor. Over time, you can work up to bigger and more complex responsibilities such as being the primary driver of their rehab at home or managing the daily maintenance of their sound processor. Whilst these may seem like small tasks, they can help increase their autonomy and confidence over time.

## 5 Praise your child

Australian parenting website, [raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au), advises using descriptive praise and encouragement to build confidence. The website says, “Teenagers may give the impression that they are self-sufficient and no longer need your approval. However, when you notice and comment on your child’s responsible choices and positive behaviour, you positively reinforce their actions. Just remember that teenagers often prefer you to praise them privately rather than in front of their friends”<sup>8</sup>.

“My family used abundant love to demonstrate their care for me and taught me that love can make people stronger. I plan to carry on this tradition with my daughter, friends, and family to show them that kindness and connection has the power to help us face life’s challenges with courage.”

Sharon, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Taiwan

## 6 Create comfort in the familiar

There is comfort in the familiar. Family rituals and daily routines can help give your child a sense of control and establish some predictability. While this may sound trivial, it can mean a great deal to your child as they enter the unpredictability of their teen years. These rituals may be anything from games nights, weekend outings to the park or even spaghetti Sunday. It will differ from family to family, but remember to celebrate the routines and rituals that are unique to your family.





## 7 Reinforce *truths* about their hearing loss

As your child becomes a teenager, they will be trying to figure out their sense of self. This is also the time where they will be especially sensitive to the opinions of their peers – opinions which aren't always positive and especially when it comes to hearing loss and communication abilities, often rooted in untruths.

For your child to be armed with a strong sense of self and be able to filter out the negative untruths spoken by peers, it is important to instil a sense of pride in what makes them different. Encourage them to explore their interests and try new things. It is important to discuss what interests them, talk about future goals for themselves and create plans on how you can work together to make it happen. When your child is confident of what they are capable of achieving, this will help root their sense-of-self in truths.

## 8 Seek out positive role models

Do not underestimate the power of positive role models, especially those that have hearing loss. It is important to introduce your child to people who they can relate to and be inspired

by. For example, Malala Yousafzai. Malala received the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17 for her outspoken advocacy on the right for all children to receive an education and for the equality of girls and women. Malala, also became a Cochlear™ implant recipient after being shot and critically injured by the Taliban in 2012.

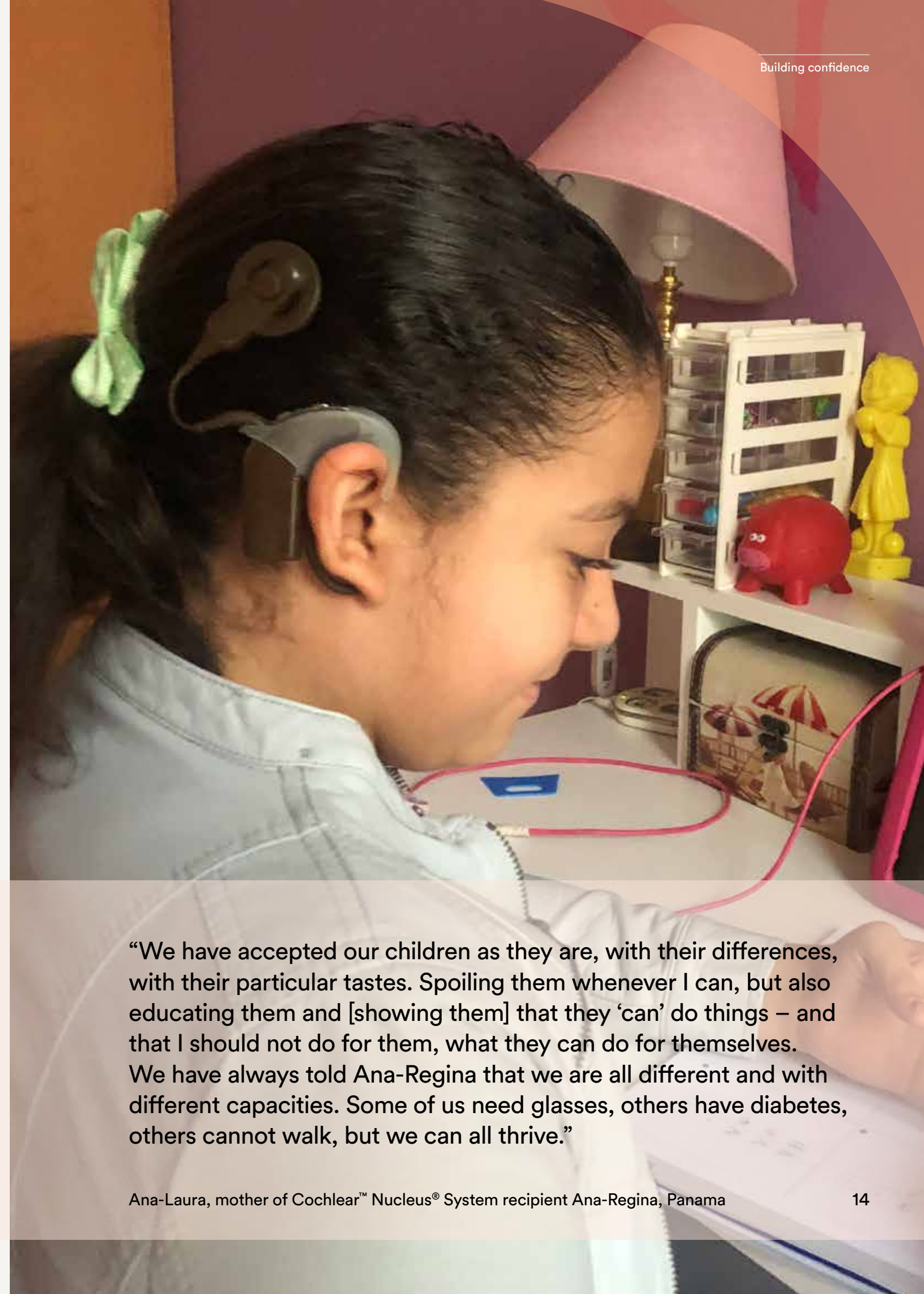
Today she continues to be a courageous role model for a generation of young people worldwide, saying: “If you don't consider [hearing loss] a weakness, that is the first step to overcoming it.”

In addition to Malala, there are a number of other athletes, writers, artists and scientists with hearing loss – all of whom are proof that hearing loss was not a barrier to achieving their goals.

It is important to remind your child that they are no different from their role models. That one day, they too might share their inspiring story of overcoming the challenges associated with hearing loss. Positive role models can build up their self-confidence and remind them that they have the capabilities to be a part of the next generation of doctors, engineers, athletes, teachers and artists.

“People with hearing loss often have low self-esteem and become easy targets. The experience with bullying is very common, especially with boys.”

Bec, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Australia



“We have accepted our children as they are, with their differences, with their particular tastes. Spoiling them whenever I can, but also educating them and [showing them] that they ‘can’ do things – and that I should not do for them, what they can do for themselves. We have always told Ana-Regina that we are all different and with different capacities. Some of us need glasses, others have diabetes, others cannot walk, but we can all thrive.”

Ana-Laura, mother of Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient Ana-Regina, Panama



# Encourage self-advocacy

Kanade, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient, Japan

Encouraging self-advocacy from a young age means that your child, once they enter their teen years, will be able to articulate their hearing loss and communicate their needs to peers, teachers, family and friends.

As a parent, there are things you can do to help foster self-advocacy in your child. It all begins with establishing an environment that rewards self-expression and open communication in the home, both of which are rooted in building confidence.

Some of the ways you can do this is by, teaching them about their hearing loss, showing them how to talk about their implant, involving them in discussions and encouraging them to make decisions for themselves. When your child has a strong sense of self, knowledge about their hearing loss and confidence – self advocacy will come more naturally to them. Here are some ways you can encourage your child to speak up.

“On her first day, I asked the school to give Kanade an opportunity to introduce herself to her classmates and explain her hearing loss.”

Ayumi, mother of Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient Kanade, Japan

## 1 Support and encourage your child's efforts

As a parent who has done everything for your child, it can take a bit of adjustment to take a step back and give your child the space to speak for themselves. However, it is important to give your child a chance to answer any questions directed at them, rather than stepping in and speaking on their behalf. Remember, space is important for developing independence. Start slow and over-time this will begin to foster a sense of self-advocacy and better understanding of their own hearing needs.

## 2 Encourage self-reliance

Start from a young age with smaller tasks and gradually increase the complexity as they get older to build confidence in their ability to be self-sufficient. For example, task your child with replacing and checking their batteries and ask them to look after the cleaning and maintenance of their devices. Also, get them to set reminders for when they need to change microphone covers and be responsible for charging their wireless accessories. Not only will this help with self-reliance, but it will increase their familiarity with the device that they wear.

## 3 Teach them about their hearing loss

It is important to familiarise your child with their hearing loss and how to explain how their implant and sound processor works. That way, they will be prepared to confidently answer the questions they are likely get at school. Also, the more they know about the limitations of their hearing and sound processor, the easier it will be for them to articulate their needs and express where they may need additional support in class or during conversations.



## 4 Include your child in discussions

When your child starts to get a bit older, it is a great idea to include them in discussions on topics that may affect them. For example, when you are looking at potential high schools and have narrowed it down to your top three preferred schools, ask for their input and take them with you when you visit schools on your shortlist. If you are meeting with teachers, coaches and learning welfare teams, always give them the option of whether they would like to come along and what they will feel comfortable sharing in these meetings. By involving your child in the decision-making process, you are telling your child that you value their opinion and their voice matters.

## 5 Stay connected with the Cochlear™ implant and Baha® community

It is important to stay connected with a community of people who understand what you and your child are going through. Annual conferences, Cochlear recipient events,

local community support groups and the Cochlear Family community are just some of the ways you can keep yourself and your child connected. Not only does this provide an opportunity for your teen to make friends with others that have hearing loss, but more importantly, it can help build their self-identity and help them find some much needed support from a community who understands and can support them.

## 6 Network with other parents

As a parent, it is natural to place all of your focus and energy on your child. But remember to be kind to yourself and take a moment to breathe and connect with other parents. We recommend staying connected and networking with other parents who can understand you, provide advice and support you. Support groups are mostly run by hearing healthcare professionals or recipients and will give you the opportunity to talk to others about how to cope in daily life. It can also be a great place to hear others' tips and tricks.

“When Pranav was younger, we would go along with him to speak to his teachers who would then communicate the message to the whole class. However, as years passed, Pranav became so confident, that he himself speaks to his classmates about it. As parents, we kept instilling courage and made sure we communicated about it openly.”

Dinesh, father of Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient Pranav, India

“Parents play an incredibly important role in laying down the environment and foundation for children with hearing loss. My mother was passionate about balancing protection with independence, and guidance with positivity.”

Alana, Cochlear™ Nucleus® System recipient and travel show host, Taiwan



# Cochlear Family

## Hear now. And always

Cochlear is dedicated to helping people with moderate to profound hearing loss experience a world full of hearing. As the global leader in implantable hearing solutions, we have helped more than 700,000 people of all ages to hear and connect with life's opportunities.

We aim to give people the best lifelong hearing experience and access to next generation technologies. We collaborate with leading clinical, research and support networks to advance hearing science and improve care.

That's why more people choose Cochlear than any other hearing implant company.

[www.cochlear.com](https://www.cochlear.com)

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Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always follow the directions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear Technology.

Cochlear™ Nucleus® implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderately severe to profound hearing loss. Baha implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderate to profound hearing loss Cochlear, Hear now. And Always, the elliptical logo, True Wireless, Nucleus, ForwardFocus\*, Kanso and Baha are either trademarks or registered trademarks of Cochlear group of companies.