



Cochlear[®]
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Gaining confidence

Support advice
for teens

Get to know your peers

Becoming a teenager can be a bit of a roller coaster and feel different for everyone. For you, it may be an exciting time where you feel like something amazing is just around the corner. It can be a time of hope and possibility, a chance for you to explore the things you are interested in, develop new ideas and opinions and widen your circle of friends.

Or, it may feel like you are stepping into a stranger's shoes. Things might feel a little unfamiliar, confusing and not entirely comfortable. It may even feel like a mix of emotions: excitement and happiness, but with a touch of nervousness thrown into the mix. Everyone is different, but that's what makes the world an interesting place.

As you enter this new phase of your life, there will be some new things you will need to navigate. For example, starting at a new school, how to tackle social media, making new friends and worrying about what the future may look like for you.

But, as a teenager with hearing loss you may have a few extra challenges that your hearing peers may not have to work through. Such as, the challenge of dealing with people who don't understand your hearing loss, potential barriers to communication and any misunderstandings that may arise because of those barriers.

At times, you might start to feel like no-one truly understands what you are going through. It is normal to feel this way, even though you may have an amazingly supportive family and circle of friends around you.

Cochlear wants you to know that you aren't alone; there are teenagers with cochlear implants and bone conduction solutions from all across the world who understand your perspective. So, we invite you to meet Cassidy, a young recipient from Sydney, Australia. Cassidy is a bilateral cochlear implant recipient who recently finished high school and is studying a Bachelor of Speech and Hearing Sciences at university. She sat down with us to share her experiences and advice.

We also share advice from other young people all across the world on the ways they've tackled some of the challenges they encountered at school and with their peers. Read their advice on how they found their place in the world, built up their confidence to talk about their hearing loss, explore their interests and learned how to be their own best advocate.



Education

1 Can you please share what your high school experience was like?

Cassidy: I went to my local mainstream high school. It was completely different from primary school and a massive transition for me; bigger school, more students and different teachers and classrooms for each subject. I was really lucky to have a wonderful teaching team which consisted of a year advisor, teachers, learning support teacher and an itinerant support teacher.

My itinerant support teacher was with me for 7 hours per week and supported me in the subjects I struggled with the most; English, Math and Science. In addition to the support I received in class, I had disability provisions for formal exams which gave me extra time and an oral interpreter who would rephrase questions to help me understand.

My advice is to find out how your school can support you and what strategies they can put in place to help you get the most out of your education.

2 How did you feel about moving from primary school to high school?

Cassidy: I went to two different primary schools, one was a special school that catered to students with significant hearing loss and the other was a mainstream school where I was integrated 90% of the time. In primary school, I experienced bullying and found it hard to make friends, so I felt nervous, worried and scared that I wouldn't fit in and make friends at high school. I knew that high school had a bigger campus and lots of different classrooms—I was worried about being late to class and feeling embarrassed if I went to the wrong classroom.

3 Was there anything your parents and teachers did to make the move from primary to high school smoother?

Cassidy: When my parents told me I was moving to a new high school, I was reluctant to move. I had to work hard to make friends in primary school and felt like I was just beginning to find my place. I was worried this move would mean having to start all over again, I was worried about not fitting in and meeting people who were not understanding of my hearing loss.

My parents met with the school principal and year advisor to discuss ways to help make the transition smoother. I also attended a 5th grade Open Day where I got to experience a taste of what high school would be like. There were activities such as food technology and woodwork workshops.

4 What is your advice to kids just about to enter high school?

Cassidy: It's normal to feel shy and nervous when you are first starting high school - I certainly was! But, try not to worry too much. You will eventually find your way to navigate all the new things that come with starting a new school. It may take some time, but the right people will come into your life and you'll make some great friends. Some of my closest friends now are the people I met at high school.

Another piece of advice is, to take advantage of all the opportunities that come your way. I wished I had attended my 6th grade orientation day because I missed the opportunity to meet other students who were starting school at the same time as me.

“The girls used to pick on me because I was different. I felt really excluded and lonely. I said nothing for five years, not even to my parents, the school, my friends, no-one. [Starting taekwondo classes] taught me how to stand up for myself. I started to learn to accept myself through taekwondo.” Taekwondo helped her find the emotional strength to stand up to a small group of school bullies. “I just talked [to them] nicely. I told them to stop it because I did not like it. Ever since then they have just backed off and they don't bother me. It feels good.”

Nese - Nucleus recipient

5 You are now at university and studying to become an Audiologist. What is your advice to kids with hearing loss when it comes to pursuing their education?

Cassidy: I'm a bilateral cochlear implant recipient with severe to profound hearing loss. So, I found it challenging to listen to my teachers and classmates when there was a lot of background noise. I found it hard to hear in the classroom and the extra effort of having to listen in a noisy environment would often leave me feeling exhausted. So, I used my FM system whenever it was possible. It made it easier for me to hear the lessons and ensure I wasn't missing important information.

My first piece of advice is not to shy away from using assistive listening technology in the classroom. Secondly, don't be afraid to speak up for yourself to ensure you have what you need to learn. Even small things like access to captions for videos can make a huge difference! Self-advocacy may not feel comfortable at first, but it is an important skill to carry on into the future, not just for high school.

“Advocate for yourself! Be aware of the things that you need and be able to express those needs to the people around you—because people can't read your mind. I didn't like asking for help but then as 11th grade progressed, I realized teachers couldn't know that I was having trouble in certain areas and that I would have to speak up and ask them for help. They were always willing to help.”

Zoe - Nucleus recipient

“Developing self-advocacy skills from a young age has really improved my life in many ways. My classmates, my teachers, my new friends, everyone—know [about my hearing loss] and what I needed from them, whether it was, ‘Please face me when you’re speaking’, ‘Please speak a bit louder, I can’t hear you’, or ‘Do you mind if we move to a quieter place?’. You are the one who understands your constantly changing needs.”

Alana - Nucleus recipient and travel show host



Navigating peer relationships

1 Tell us about your experience of starting at a new school and making new friends.

Cassidy: I was lucky enough to make life-long friends on my first day of high-school and I am still close friends with them today. There were certainly some ups and downs when it came to forming friendships—I realized that not everyone is your best friend and not everyone is going to agree with your opinion. So, it’s important to be open-minded.

2 What was your experience forming friendships with hearing peers vs peers with hearing loss?

Cassidy: I went to a local mainstream high school. My friends and I bonded over similar interests and hobbies. They always treated me like a normal teenager and made me feel included. The only difference was that they would sometimes get frustrated when I asked them to repeat things. But, I always made sure to remind them ‘Hey, sometimes I have difficulty listening, so you might need to repeat what you said’ and afterwards they would be okay with it.

3 What is your advice to kids or teenagers that may be struggling to make new friends?

Cassidy: [being a teenager] is a time of transition and change which can lead to pressures in friendships. Struggling to make friends can make it hard to enjoy school or focus on schoolwork. Don’t keep it to yourself. My advice is to reach out and talk to a school counselor or year advisor who can help connect you with a *buddy*—a student in the same grade who may have similar interests or hobbies.

4 Did you ever experience bullying or receive negative comments from peers?

Cassidy: Having experienced bullying in primary school, I was nervous and scared that I would experience the same thing in high school. Thankfully, I had a lovely, inclusive and warm school community.

“I actively tried to engage with my classmates. It was nice to be able to share what we loved learning about in class, amongst other interests. If I didn’t hear something in class, I could just message them at home and ask, ‘what was the homework?’. My friends were always willing to help.”

Zoe - Nucleus recipient

Confidence and self-advocacy

1 What is your advice to kids or teenagers searching for the courage to self-advocate and speak about their hearing loss?

Cassidy: It took a while for me to start talking about my hearing loss—it wasn't until I met other people around my age who had a hearing loss too. Meeting others and realizing that I wasn't the only one who had issues and challenges was a real turning point for me. I realized that I wasn't alone, there are others with hearing loss who have similar experiences as me. My confidence to talk about my hearing loss and express my needs has grown over time. It stems from a mixture of community connection, having the support of friends and family and having parents that always had my best interests at heart.

So, my piece of advice to other young people still searching for courage to speak about hearing loss is:

1. Connect with other young people who have a hearing loss. They may be better able to understand you and empathize with the way you feel.
2. Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone.
3. Be open with friends and family. They are a great place to start when you are starting to build up your confidence to talk about hearing loss.
4. Find a buddy or close friend who understands your hearing loss. They can act as a support person when you don't feel comfortable to share about your hearing loss when asked. Over time, you may find that your buddy/friend doesn't need to step in to answer questions about your hearing loss.



“Life is not always easy at school. Being ostracized is an everyday thing—some days it's hard to muster the courage to go to school. [Isy] has found a beautiful tribe outside of school. Isy has also been lucky to find inspiring Art and English teachers who have ignited a spark for Isy. She's loving drawing, cartooning and animation.”

Rachael - Mother of nucleus recipient, Isy

Extra-curricular and community involvement

1 How involved are you in the Deaf community and what made you make that first step to connect with other young people with hearing loss?

Cassidy: In high school, I felt anxious about what the future held for me. I was worried that I wouldn't get into university or into the right course. I knew I wanted to pursue a career in the hearing health field. After 13 years of schooling, stress and many emotional break downs, I was delighted to be offered a place at university to study a Bachelor of Speech and Hearing Sciences.

Knowing how stressful this time can be, motivated me to get more involved in the Deaf community. I wanted to use my experiences of being a teenager with hearing loss to help other young people just starting their high school journey.

In 2018, I started volunteering as a classroom assistant at a Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) School here in Sydney. And in 2019, I also started volunteering for an organization called Hear For You which aims to support deaf or hard-of-hearing high school students. Getting involved in the Deaf/recipient community has not only built my confidence but it has allowed me to give back and hopefully inspire the next generation of young people.

2 You were involved in extra-curricular groups or activities during high school. How did you first get involved and what were some other ways you explored your interests?

Cassidy: Growing up, I was always a shy and introverted girl. As I got a little older, I realized that I needed to push myself out of my comfort zone. Otherwise, I would remain reliant on my parents and brothers to always speak for me.

When I was around 13 years old, I started feeling a bit lost and knew I was lacking in confidence. This really motivated me to try exploring what interested me. In 9th grade, I discovered my interest in badminton. When I told my parents that I wanted to start playing a sport, they were so encouraging and supportive. They said "Sure, no problem. Let's do it!" and enrolled me shortly after. I trained for four hours per week and met lovely people who were understanding—they were patient, kind and willing to repeat any instructions I missed in training. This is where I truly started to build my confidence.

One of my hobbies is baking and cooking. In 10th grade, my school offered a barista training course, so I immediately signed up. Not only did I learn how to make coffee, but I got to know the teachers at school a bit more and got the opportunity to speak with other students I normally wouldn't interact with.

3 What is your advice to kids or teenagers thinking about trying a new activity or getting connected with other community groups?

Cassidy: My advice to other young people is to get connected with the [Deaf] community and think about what interests you and don't be afraid to try new things. Sometimes, it can take a bit of trial and error to find out what is enjoyable. It took me a while before I found something I loved and also connect with Deaf community groups, but when I did, it really transformed how I felt about myself.

I was also very involved in my local church from a young age. This gave me the opportunity to connect with a supportive, warm and understanding group of people each week.

It was through these community groups I found a sense of belonging and had the chance to connect with other people with similar interests and values. I also felt like I found my identity, my voice and my confidence.



“Anything to do with the creative arts is my happy place! I love that I can push boundaries, discovering that I’m constantly getting better and stronger with everything that I can do. I produced a short film call ‘Silence and Sound’. I wanted to teach [my classmates] how to deal with me and to educate the community as well.”

Tallulah - Nucleus recipient

Social media and pop culture

1 What role do you think social media plays in the lives of teens with hearing loss? Do you have any advice you can share to teens about social media use?

Cassidy: Social media has a lot of pros, especially for a young person with hearing loss. It has made communication more inclusive by making it easier to connect with others. Social media has also given teens with hearing loss a platform to share their story and showcase their capabilities. My tip for social media is to use it as a way to connect with others with hearing loss and know when to step back when you read negative comments.

Remember, social media can be a double-edged sword and that there is a fine line between positive and negative social media use. When you start using social media, think about how you want to use it and what you want to get out of it. Try to engage with positive content on topics that interest you.

2 Do you have any role models and who do you follow on social media that inspires you?

Cassidy: Malala Yousoufzai is one of my personal role models. In December 2018, I was fortunate enough to meet Malala and hear her speak about her hearing loss journey. She reminded me that everyone has the right to speak up for themselves. After meeting her, I became more determined to raise awareness about hearing loss in society for young people. I believe there is a lack of understanding about what means to have a hearing loss. Hearing loss is often referred to as the invisible disability. It's my goal to make hearing loss more visible in the minds of hearing people.

I also use Instagram as a way to be inspired. I follow an instagrammer who is a deaf audiologist. She has inspired me to continue persevering with my studies during the more challenging days. I am reminded that a deaf person can become an audiologist and that I have the power to shape my future.

My advice for kids or teens with hearing loss is to find positive role models that you can look up to. During life's lows, having inspiring role models can help give you the motivation you need.

“My perspective on being deaf is that these are the cards you’ve been dealt with, so make the best use of it. Put your focus on your goals and your dreams and do what you can, one step at a time.”

Alana - Nucleus recipient and travel show host



Cochlear Family would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Cassidy—this guide would not have been possible without your support.

Cassidy is 21-year-old bilateral cochlear implant recipient born and raised in Sydney, Australia. She is studying a Bachelor of Speech and Hearing Sciences at university, where she plans on continuing her studies to obtain a Masters Degree in Clinical Audiology. She volunteers at several non-profit organizations and works with children who have significant hearing loss and use cochlear implants and hearing aids to access spoken language. In her spare time she enjoys hanging out with friends and family, baking delicious goodies and binge watching Netflix.

Cassidy - Nucleus recipient with Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousoufzai

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As the global leader in implantable hearing solutions, Cochlear is dedicated to helping people with moderate to profound hearing loss experience a life full of hearing. We have provided more than 600,000 implantable devices, helping 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 innovative future technologies. We collaborate with leading clinical, research and support networks.

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

* The Malala Fund and hearing health not-for-profit, Cochlear Foundation have united to raise awareness about the barriers keeping millions of young people with hearing loss from accessing a quality education. Together Malala Fund and Cochlear Foundation aspire to remove hearing loss as a barrier to life's opportunities, so all children and young people can gain a quality education and realize their ability to thrive throughout their life. 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 read instructions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear technology.

Views expressed by Cochlear recipients are those of the individual. Consult your hearing health provider to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear technology. Outcomes and results may vary.

In the United States, the Cochlear Nucleus Implant System is approved for use in children 9 to 24 months of age who have profound sensorineural hearing loss in both ears and demonstrate limited benefit from appropriate hearing aids. Children 2 years of age or older may demonstrate severe to profound hearing loss in both ears.

In the Canada, the Cochlear Nucleus Implant System (CI500 and CI600 Series) is approved for use in children 9 to 24 months of age who have profound sensorineural hearing loss in both ears and demonstrate limited benefit from appropriate hearing aids. Children 2 years of age or older may demonstrate severe to profound hearing loss in both ears.

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Cochlear Americas
10350 Park Meadows Drive
Lone Tree, CO 80124 USA
Telephone: 303 790 9010
Support: 800 483 3123

Cochlear Canada Inc.
2500-120 Adelaide Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 1T1 Canada
Support: 800 483 3123

www.cochlear.com/us