



COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS A-Z™

Church/ Worship/ Faith Considerations

1. What do we mean by Faith Community/Worship/Faith Considerations?

For many families the church, synagogue, mosque or religious institution is a great source of encouragement and strength that they lean upon. A family's faith background and religious beliefs help to shape the ways in which they view the world, form the values they develop, and shape the practices that they guide their daily lives by. Because of this, as one considers the choice of communication for their deaf or hard of hearing child, the place of worship or the family's faith system is an important consideration in making the best choice for which communication method they will choose. One parent I know put it to me this way as he spoke about the reason that he selected their particular church for their family. "I want to know that when I am gone, there will be a group of individuals that will know my child, and will provide for him the same spiritual care that his mother and I have strived to do while we have been with him throughout his life". For this parent his faith community had great importance for him as he considered the future care of his son.

Parents also turn to their faith beliefs and practices to help them come to terms with the grief and loss that sometimes is a part of the experience as they are learning to cope with the circumstances that come with having a deaf or hard of hearing child. They may seek the counsel of their pastor, rabbi, imam, or a trusted mentor within their faith community to help them as they make decisions. They may ask for support or prayer for decisions and/or emotional and spiritual encouragement from their faith community and these relationships are vital for helping them deal with times of uncertainty, and challenge.

For the child who is deaf or hard of hearing, having the support of a particular community and a faith belief they share in common with many others within their own faith community may also be an important part of their development of their self image and how they feel about themselves. Feeling a part of a larger group of people with different backgrounds and life experiences and life circumstances can be a wonderful experience to help mold and shape their lives as they grow into the adult years. Since communication is at the heart of much of this interaction, the method and kinds of communication may facilitate or unfortunately hinder the child from feeling a part of this larger group. Being able to relate to their peers is important and so communication considerations play an important role in this process occurring.

2. What issues are at the forefront of faith community/ worship/ faith considerations?

At the heart of this is the variety or lack of variety in communication styles that the faith community uses in their meetings and activities. Of course just about every faith group uses the oral method of communication and some larger faith communities provide manual communication methods in addition to the oral method but often times these services may be offered by volunteers and may not always be of the highest quality depending upon the size and resources of the faith community. Sometimes FM systems are available or special sections within the seating for the ability to have an audio trainer and/or amplification to hear the speakers or music more clearly.

With the changes in technology, many churches and other faith communities are using such services as closed captioning and typewell services as well as the internet and other forms of media to provide the message or the teachings in a variety of ways. This helps to provide access to the heart of these groups that for many years has been lacking with many faith communities. As technology continues to grow and evolve, faith organizations are using these new types of communication choices as the size and budgets of their communities grow.

3. What should every parent or professional know about faith community/ worship/ faith considerations?

One of the first things that parents and/or professional needs to consider is to express the need and the reason(s) for it appropriately to the proper person within the congregation, synagogue, and mosque who can help address that need. Just being willing to share your “story” and to help them understand why will help them work with you for a solution. There are wonderful verses throughout the scriptures that tell us we need to ask for the things that we need. James in his short epistle even goes on to say “You do not have not, because you do not ask. . .” (James 4:2) so don’t be afraid to express your needs to those in charge. I find that most leaders are willing to help to overcome obstacles but you may need to the source of educating them as to options that are available.

Secondly, the size of the community and/or its resources determines many of the considerations as far as technology that are available. Many times pastors, rabbis, or imams are sympatric to the needs of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing but they lack the financial resources that are needed to purchase the technology etc. Think creatively with them to come up with ways to help offset the cost of these items or perhaps take on the challenge of helping to raise funds and recruit members of the faith community to “take up the challenge” with you.

Typically larger faith communities will have better resources and/or people to provide help in general. If you are currently not a part of one of these faith communities consider either starting a group within your own faith community or join an established group to see to it your child's needs are being met.

4. Where can I find information about resources of my faith-based groups?

Larger religious publishers provide resources for churches and other faith communities to use with deaf and hard of hearing students. Many of these kinds of resources are marketed to these communities via catalogs and direct mailing. Get on some of these mailing lists and check with these groups or your own particular denomination or faith practice to see what resources are available. Also check with the ministers or persons within the congregation or community that work with the media and/or technology that your particular faith community employs. If an audiologist or other professional who works with deaf or hard of hearing people in their professional roles are a member of your particular faith community contact these individuals about resources for your church and for your child's individual needs. The same communication aides that are used at school and in other settings also can be used at the faith community as well. Think creatively about how you can enhance communication.

Don't be afraid to find the solutions yourself through the internet or through your own education in working with your child and bring your expertise to the leaders of your faith community and ask them for help in meeting the needs of your child. Take the opportunity to educate all who show an interest in you or your child's life about the unique needs and challenges to overcome. You will find that these people will embrace the vision to provide sound communication practices for everyone regardless of the particular communication choice that the family or the individual has made.

AUTHOR:

Tom Edwards currently works as a hospice chaplain and has been a pastor/chaplain for over twenty years. Originally, from Oklahoma City, Tom moved to Arkansas in 1995 and currently lives in Russellville, Arkansas. Tom is married to Sue his wife of seven years and they have seven children between the two of them. One of Tom's daughters, Karie, was born with a bi-lateral hearing loss related to a condition known as Klippel-Feil Syndrome. Tom holds a Master's degree in Music History from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth and a Bachelor's degree in Choral Conducting from Prescott College, in Prescott, Arizona. Before moving to Arkansas, Tom has lived and served congregations in Oklahoma, Arizona, and Texas as a Southern Baptist and now a minister within the Fellowship Bible Church. Tom is currently serving as chair of Arkansas Hands & Voices and is involved in the implementation of the parent support organization for the state of Arkansas. He is also active in issues related to deafness and hearing impairment throughout the state and serves as an active member of the Arkansas Coalition for the Education of Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (ACED). Tom has been invited to be a presenter at events around the state related to deaf and hard of hearing issues.

Communication Considerations A to Z™ is a series from Hands & Voices that's designed to help families and the professionals working with them access information and further resources to assist them in raising and educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We've recruited some of the best in the business to share their insights on the many diverse considerations that play into communication modes & methods, and so many other variables that are part of informed decision making. We hope you find the time to read them all!