

Lifetrack's Family Mentor Program

Results of a needs assessment of families with young children who are deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) in Minnesota and next steps for program expansion

1 | Mentoring and support

Parents of young children who are D/HH most commonly need the following kinds of mentoring and support:

- **Emotional support** to help them through their initial stage of grief
- An **adult role model** who is D/HH can help parents feel hopeful about their child's future, and help the child gain self-esteem, positive identity, and self-advocacy skills
- **American Sign Language (ASL)** and communication skills and tools like Cued Speech and lip reading
- **Information** about assistive technologies – cochlear implants and hearing aids

2 | Mentoring program structure

In terms of mentoring program structure, families want and need:

- **More customization and flexibility** with regard to when, where, and how often they meet with their mentor, as well as which topics are covered and which family members are required or allowed to participate
- **Increased age limits** so families with older (school-age) children can participate
- **More activities to help them connect** with other families with children who are D/HH

3 | Characteristics of mentors

There are several characteristics of mentors that are commonly recognized as critical to the success of D/HH mentoring programs:

- **Flexible, with good communication skills** to work with hearing people without an interpreter
- **Unbiased** – accepting and supportive of families' choices about communication mode(s) and use of assistive technologies, in particular
- **A good match** for the family in terms of similar type of hearing loss, mode(s) of communication used, and assistive technologies used, as well as culture and language
- Mentors who are primarily supposed to be teaching ASL to the family should also be trained and skilled at using best practices in **visual language education**

