

Have you Heard “A Listening Project”
Episode #8 - Challenges of Virtual Learning
Hosts: Alle Rhames and Mary Catherine Hess
Guest Host: Mickie Oliva and Jennifer Clark

Mary Catherine (0:03) Hello and welcome to “Have you Heard? A Listening Project.” On this podcast we share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. Today we’re going to talk about the challenges of virtual learning for kids who have hearing loss. This is a crazy time for all of us and with so many schools canceling in-person classes many students are faced with on-line work, which may be very new to so many of them. Don’t forget to stay until the end of the episode where we will share tips for successful virtual learning for kids with hearing loss. There are a lot of great resources out there which can help you and your students and we want to share them with you. I’m Mary Catherine, and I have spent the majority of my career connected to and working with both deaf and hard of hearing children and adults. I have spent time in the classroom at the beginning of my career as a teacher and now I spend some of my time interpreting for deaf students who are doing virtual learning in addition to my “day job” as a Hearing Health advocate. On today’s episode, I’m joined by my colleague Alle, who has a background in counseling

Alle (1:11) Well hey everybody!

Mary Catherine (1:13) Hi Alle, so glad you’re here today (Alle...thank you) and also joining us this week are our special guests Mickie and Jennifer. Mickie is one of our colleagues here at OEI, and she has some insider knowledge of what it’s like for students with hearing loss who have needed to shift to virtual learning. She has a deaf daughter, Gina, who is currently taking online classes for her senior year of college. Jennifer also has a daughter who’s a senior who is faced with different challenges this year. She has experienced both remote and now in-person classes and I can tell you that going back into the classroom has its own unique challenges.

So welcome to you both of you, thank you so much. I want you to tell us a little bit about your children, so Mickie?

Mickie (1:57) Hi! So nice to be here and thanks for having me. As you mentioned as a colleague, I am an outreach educator for CapTel Caption Telephones for over six years now. We live in south Florida and I am the mother of two children born with hearing loss, both have cochlear implants. Gina has had an implant

since she was a baby so at 22 years old now, I've been involved with lots of parent support groups and I personally know the value of learning from mother's experiences.

Alle (2:32) That sounds great Mickie, I can't wait to learn more.

Mary Catherine (2:35) Alright and Jennifer, why don't you tell us a little bit about your daughter.

Jennifer (2:39) Hello everybody and thank you for having me. I have been the manager of the Dallas Hearing Foundation for 9 years and part of that I worked in real estate in the legal field. I am married with 3 children, 23, 21 and 19 and I grew up in Plano and have now made it my home for the last 40 years in Texas you guys are from out of state. My middle child, Dakota, is deaf so when she was implanted I became aware of the Dallas Hearing Foundation and started volunteering with them. When the previous administrator decided to move out of state, I was invited to apply and I have been with DHF ever since.

Alle (3:16) Fantastic! Oh it's so great to be here with all of you guys. I know that I'm personally very excited to delve into this topic. I have been an advocate on behalf of the hearing loss industry since 2008, and I do also have a master's degree in Counseling Psychology, and this year it's become especially challenging for kids and for students who are relying on home learning. It's so vitally important to understand how and why children with hearing loss need specific educational tools and also the coping mechanisms to aid the 'at home learning lifestyle'. So Mickie and Jennifer, I'm just really excited to hear your perspectives, I'm really really excited. While distance learning is new and it's sometimes challenging in terms of everything that it presents for all school-age children, it can really present unique difficulties for children with hearing loss. Many children with hearing loss have already had to navigate the difficulties of attending school in general and also finding ways to successfully communicate with their teacher and their classmates. Now, they are also being asked to adapt to yet another way of learning and communicating.

Mary Catherine (4:25) And I can tell you I have some firsthand experience with this of late I have done some interpreting in the virtual environment and it has been just a really crazy animal to manage. What I've noticed in particular is trying to keep children's attention or the student's attention which is so critical in the classroom and especially for our students who are accessing information visually. You can only imagine how strange it is to have multiple people talking on the screen at the same time. And there is no eye contact and we really and truly is what we depend on in the classroom to get our kids attention just isn't really

available to us as easily in this environment. So our basic rules of attention getting are just out the window. Further, if students are depending on captions that add another layer to it, because they may be looking either at another window on their screen or another device. So again, not necessarily looking directly at the teacher or the interpreter or whomever is holding class. I say all that to emphasize how working with children or young adult in a virtual educational space does not look like or feel like a traditional classroom. We have to be so cognizant of the needs of the learners who are using visual information to stay engaged and to boot- to learn new concepts.

Alle (5:50) I think you're absolutely right Mary Catherine, I can't agree with you more actually. Mickie, you have a daughter who is in college so how has this shift to virtual learning affected her?

Mickie (6:01) Well Gina is now in her senior year of college. Her major is Hospitality and Resort Management. She attends Florida Gulf Coast University which is on the west coast of Florida and we live in the Fort Lauderdale area. So she's lived there for the past 3 years. All of her classes are now held virtually. And she did move back home from her apartment at her college last March to complete her spring semester of her Junior year, so she's been home since then. There was a requirement for her to do a second internship. She had the opportunity in her major to complete her first internship on site which she loved. She loved being you know with people and in person and learning hands on working with a mentor. For her second internship that had to be done online and so they changed that program so she could do it virtually to accommodate all the students who needed to meet that requirement for the second internship. Many of the instructors were international and that was very challenging as they all had different accents and even with the support of note takers and captioning it really just had a lot more challenges for her trying to do it in that environment.

Alle (7:28) Right, wow I mean that would certainly make things even more difficult. Jennifer, I understand that your daughter is not actually attending online classes, but is actually meeting in person. Yet things are very different for her now, too. So, can you tell us how the pandemic has affected her?

Jennifer (7:46) Sure, my daughter who is 21 is bilaterally implanted and actually her classes have all been in person as of late. So it's a whole different set of challenges.

Mary Catherine (7:58) Can you just explain what that means bilaterally implanted for people who may not know what that means?

Jennifer (8:02) Sure, so my daughter was born with something called EVA which is Enlarged Vestibular Aqueducts Syndrome which it's a fluctuating hearing loss. So we knew that it's fluctuating and it's also progressive loss. So we knew she would eventually lose all her hearing. So she wore hearing aids as long as those benefited her. And then when her hearing bottomed out we transitioned to cochlear implants. And bilateral means she's implanted in both of her ears. And so the cochlear implant is her sound processor that she wears behind her ear. It's a transmitter that send sounds signals to her receiver and stimulator implanted under her skin which is attached by a magnet which then stimulates the auditory nerve with electrons to the cochlear. So she has a mechanical ear for both of her ears essentially.

Mary Catherine (8:53) Okay, and so how is that so she is in college now, tell us a little bit about her college experience now that she's back in the classroom during the pandemic.

Jennifer (9:03) Yes, this has been challenging because all of the students now have to wear masks and so in addition to the professor wearing a mask, she does have CART which is captioning so that does help. However, when there is class discussion, she cannot understand what her peers are saying because of the masks. She's done a few classes online supplementing and there's CART for that as well. However, she's mentioned a lot of the teachers are playing videos and the videos are not captioned so she's found it challenging. We did send a bunch of clear masks for some of her school mates to wear to help with lip reading kind of get the visual cues as well.

Mary Catherine (9:43) You know, you mentioned CART people may or may not know what that means but it stands for Communication Access Realtime Translation. I actually had to look that up because I think it used to be a slightly different acronym gosh 15-20 years ago. But anyway, it's real time captioning that's generally provided in a public space. You might see it at a conference, you might see it at a large presentation, etc. And it's intended to make it accessible for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. CART is provided by a highly trained and certified CART writer or a CART captioner. And the main advantage to CART in the classroom is that the caption writer actually has the ability to build custom dictionaries so that the specialized terminology that comes up or acronyms or proper names can be correctly captioned and that's a really big deal specially as you get higher into your education and you're using more specialized terminology. The other advantage with CART is you can project not only on a single monitor for the student but you can also project on a large screen so not just that student but the entire class or the audience gets the benefit of it. And I'm curious since your daughter is using CART and Mickie's daughter is using some captioning in school, how did you first learned about CART Jennifer? And

how did that come to be for your daughter Dakota, correct?

Jennifer (11:15) Correct, aha. So actually I went to court reporting school a long time ago to be a captioner so I knew about it and I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis while I was in court reporting school so I chose the option of not to continue because of wouldn't of been able to do it very long. So I have a lot of friends that are captioners. So my children have a great school district and they start CART in high school so 9th grade for those students. So you can request it as an accommodation in Plano school district actually has captioners that are on staff so they are paid by the school district and they are there, they are called on site CART providers which means they are physically in the room with the student. So they basically sit next to the student that is using it and they have either a laptop or iPad that they open up and then as soon as the professor or teacher starts speaking then the captioning's come up in what they call real time so it's live so those are the same people that are doing captioning for television shows that you might see. They have a 3 second delay so those captioners are like court reporters but they have to go to additional schooling so that they can have a really clean writing because they are live essentially. And so with college they do offsite so a girl that I actually went to court reporting school with happens to have the contract with her college so sometimes when she does captioning is a friend of ours that does her captioning but she just hands the microphone to her professor they pin that on his shirt and then she signs in and hold up her iPad and then the professor starts speaking and the captioner can hear from wherever she is usually in her pajamas at home and then gets to caption the class. Which is kind of fun cause they said we love getting to listen to all those college classes, we're getting almost a free education with all of that. So it's a great tool for them cause the more you see something and hear something it reinforces it so it's been really great for her.

Alle (13:19) So Jennifer I just have to point out, I love hearing the dog in the background, because I actually have three dogs of my own and I'm sitting here thinking I don't know why my dogs are actually not barking themselves. I like hearing the dogs bark in the background. But I wanted to say, thank you for putting that personal touch on the explanation of what CART is because it's a really really great tool in some circumstances. What else can we do to make virtual learning more effective for people with hearing loss? Mickie?

Mickie (13:47) Well, what we've done since Gina's classes are all on line is that she's got to learn how to use all of the captioning tools available to her and she does make a point to communicate with her professors about what her needs are. She's also employed note takers for several of her classes which is a wonderful accommodations so the notes are then provided to her via email, other students take notes. It is a lot of work for these deaf students to have to basically **redo** their classes by reading students' notes in addition to the professors power

point notes and try to piece together what actually you know happened during the class. She does spend the latter time re-creating her notes after she does attend the class. You know, as a parent, I just believe that we all need to be aware of all the options available to support online learning and then let the students themselves explore options and decide which works best for them for each class. I think just being flexible and open to options is really the key for them in finding what's going to work best for them.

Alle (15:03) Absolutely Mickie I think that's a really great point and it's something that we all should think about. Sometimes those options may be hard to find.

Jennifer, what are your thoughts?

Jennifer (15:13) So, in North Texas we have the Dallas Hearing Foundation where I work and we have the DHF Teen Squad which we started for teens with hearing loss. So I've been staying in contact with the students and their parents during the pandemic since we haven't been able to meet in person. So we've talked a lot about different things that worked and have not worked for those and the student are relying on virtual/online learning and a lot of times during speech on a computer, they lose those visual cues as well as the vocal inflection and those are cues for them as well. So closed captioning has been a great tool. However, then sometimes like Mary Catherine said, they're not looking where they need to be looking and not paying attention to things they need to be paying attention to and I know I've heard from a lot of parents about learning no listening, I'm sorry listening fatigue, that's been a big issue. I know I've heard some suggestions of using an external microphone for the teachers so that the sound is more concentrated like on a headset. Reducing background noise which would include my dogs in the background. Having the teachers or peers be easy to see their mouths and faces or have the speaker view, I know you can choose on zoom, so that the speaker is larger so that you're paying more attention and able to see a little bit better. Some are also using FM systems that they use when they were in the classroom as well but further amplifies whatever two of them may be using if it's a hearing aid or cochlear implant.

Alle (16:43) These are all really great suggestions. It sounds like it takes a lot of experimentation to find a method that works best for every individual student which is a lot. Mickie, what other technologies are available to Gina that you're aware of?

Mickie (16:57) The technology of course that I am most aware of, in addition to captioning telephones that can be used alongside video conferencing is Microsoft Team. And even though, I haven't had any personal experience with it, that is the platform that Gina's college has employed for all her classes so far. It does have a built-in Closed Caption option that she does select for every lecture or presentation. In addition, her professors post pre-recorded lessons on "Canvas"

which is her school's platform for posting assignments, grades and communication with her professors. She's been very fortunate because all of the pre-recorded lessons have offer captioning as well. So she really has not had to go outside of the system that's provided by her school so far for these online classes.

Alle (17:57) I'm so happy to hear that they have the captions available, I mean that's huge. And what about your daughter Jennifer?

Jennifer (18:05) She mainly relies on CART and the captioning as I mentioned and sometimes she does use the FM or Roger Pen System for further amplification.

Mary Catherine (18:15) And again for those who may not know, the Roger Pen System is basically a microphone that provides additional support for either environments that are loud, noisy or when you're like really far away from the speaker. So, it's clear the two of you are advocates for your children, what is the best way to go about advocating for your children in this environment so they get the access that they need?

Jennifer (18:40) So at an early age we started teaching Dakota to advocate for herself. The school district was really good about that as well. This has also been something we focused on with the DHF Teen Squad.

Mary Catherine (18:53) And, can you maybe talk a little bit about what that is?

Jennifer (18:55) So, when the Dallas Hearing Foundation, just so everybody knows we're a non-profit that is based here in Dallas, and our mission is to provide medical and surgical treatment, hearing technologies, speech and hearing rehabilitation and educational support to those in financial need. So that can include hearing aids, cochlear implants, audiology services. We usually are filling in the gaps for insurance where Medicare or Medicaid doesn't cover. So, we're based in Dallas but we serve all of Texas in the United States and actually have international patients. So, I say everything before COVID because before COVID we had monthly meetings for adults with hearing loss as well as teens which I keep referring to the DHF Teen Squad. We would meet monthly and then they would learn to advocate for themselves. They have mentors come and talk to them about future careers and then we also talk to them about giving back to their community. We also want them to form some friendships with other teens with hearing loss cause some of them are the only deaf student in the entire school. But since we've not been able to meet, the teens are really missing the socialization part of meetings. My daughter usually meets with the school and

academic counselors prior to classes so that her professors understand she has a hearing loss and what she hears and doesn't hear and what accommodations would work best for her. She sits up front, she has the professor wear the microphone for the FM and then the CART. She's been real good about when she struggles in any way to tell the teacher that she's struggling and how they can make it work. My friend that is her captionist, sometimes she had mentioned to me that when she first started with CART, that she handed the microphone to one of the professor and he didn't want to wear it. He left it on the podium and she was like "No" I can't hear you when it's on the podium. So she spoke up for herself and she said "that was really good that she spoke up for herself" so now he knows to put it on his actual shirt instead of just living it somewhere. So, she's been lucky that most of her professor have been really great that if she struggles she's really good about speaking up.

Mary Catherine (21:09) And what about you Mickie?

Mickie (21:11) Oh, I feel like I get exactly what Jennifer is saying about her daughter. We taught Gina at a very young age to advocate, she is very proactive about her needs and the same thing as Dakota she would meet with her professors ahead of time review her accommodations you know such as preferential seating, note takers, access to presentation notes, captioning on recorded information. She still does the same reaching out to them she's just doing it via "Canvas" and she still makes her introduction to them personally via that platform to let them know that she may be requesting additional accommodations if they are not provided along the way. And there are other things that she's learned that even though there's a portal thru the school, sometimes the professors prefer to communicate via text or email so she's learned to meet each one with their prefer method of communication so there's not a lot of time of waiting if something needs to be provided for her, you know before the next class so that they are not checking in on the...it's good for the professors as well you know so they're having to learn you know how to communicate more effectively via on line. But I think just making them an advocate at a young age is the key to everything.

Mary Catherine (22:38) And I think that really is the key. I've talked to a lot of parents who have young children with hearing loss and they often talk of you know imparting on them this need to learn how to advocate for themselves from a young age so I'm really glad to hear that you've all done as well. So, when it comes to the home environment, when your kids are home and schooling, Jennifer I know your daughter isn't at home, she's doing classes in person right now but when she was at home and for you Mickie, what is the best way to make the home environment conducive to learning and studying?

Mickie (23:15) Well, I know it's just kind of for us it's the common sense approach with all of us now or most of us in my family working from home. We've learned to block off certain times on certain days where in a quiet place. You know we have posted on the door that says do not disturb or on the dining room table when you know no one else is home. As a family you just learn to work around each other's time constraints. Gina does use her Mac laptop and occasionally she will use bluetooth headphones if she needs that you know for a certain class or a webinar that she's listening to and that's work for her so far.

Mary Catherine (23:57) How about you Jennifer?

Jennifer (23:59) I am just very glad that I don't have young children at home that I have to separate for different grade levels and make quiet time I'm very thankful for that so knock on wood. But my daughter usually will go in her room sit at her desk close the door let everybody know she's going online or going to be doing class work so that she can concentrate on any online learning. So she kind of isolates somewhere where she knows it'll be quiet.

Alle (24:22) Well that sound pretty good, sounds pretty organized which is what you have to be these days. So switching focus just a bit, how is the pandemic affecting your students or your daughters social lives? Mickie how about you guys?

Mickie (24:36) This of course is huge for any young adult and at 22 years old you know Gina is really feeling that void. She was very engaged with her college social life you know her friends having a job and she was just so ingrained in that college social life interaction and she missed it. Since moving back home last spring she has reconnected with some of her high school friends. She's also recently gotten another job here at home and joined a gym with some friends. We're encouraging her to get out whenever she can whether is around school or not and of course with social media that also keeps them connected to friends that either still living in the college community or with the many who have also moved back home and are just out and about.

Alle (25:28) Right, right. Jennifer, what about you guys?

Jennifer (25:32) Yes, it's hard on a 21 year old to understand why you they can't go out and about with friends like you used to doing before the pandemic started and I know that hearing loss is isolating and with the quarantine it's made it even more isolating. We've tried to stay engaged with our teen group cause I'm seeing that across the board. Doing interactive activities, we did some bingo on zoom. We are actually, we usually host a cooking segment where we have a

lady that has hearing loss that's a professor at one of the college here locally that teaches them to cook a dish every week. So, we're just actually sending out sour dough starter kits so that they can all do it at home and then we can join in zoom. So we're just trying to find ways to keep them connected. They need that socialization. They need to be around other teens that are like them. I know they are craving it. We have one of teen that is in the group who is the only person with hearing loss in her school and she had that group to socialize with and now she doesn't. So she doesn't want to wear her hearing aids or identify as deaf right now because she doesn't want to wear her hearing aids because she doesn't want to be different.

Alle (26:41) That is just so hard I mean it's so hard right now. The psychological impact on students homeschooling due to the pandemic, is really something to be considered, if not taken extremely seriously. The lack of active physical socialization and the focus upon mainly just technology for both learning and interaction has created a severe increase in mental health issues which can including anything from anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem just to name a few. So researchers argue that mental health issues have increased due to the pandemic, and students in particular appear to really have a lack of socialized interest comparable to years prior. Additionally, parents who are homeschooling can confirm that self-esteem and confidence have especially dipped and is due to the pandemic aspects of homeschooling, as well as increased social media usage.

Mary Catherine (27:36) I knew anecdotally that the switch to on-line learning was stressful. I too was taking classes in the spring when the pandemic hit and when we switched to online it was really hard. But all the students who are deaf and hard of hearing it is definitely different. I looked to the National Deaf Center for Postsecondary Outcomes they have all kinds of great resources around education for deaf and hard of hearing students and they had a report they had a survey that they did with a vocational rehab panel and what they found in that survey was that insolation and mental health issues going the highest in the pandemic's impact on deaf youth, followed by uncertainty and inability to plan for the future, lack of technology and online access, and of course academic setbacks. And academic setbacks were even common for hearing our students who are hearing who are having access issues per se, it's a real issue. They went on to say that 74% of deaf college students consider online learning more difficult than traditional learning. And I guess all I can say it's It's another layer of effort and stress in learning environments that are often not friendly to a visual language users or those who are heavily dependent on visual cues and technology to access auditory information like Jennifer and Mickie's daughters.

Alle (29:06) Right. Despite that, if you have a child with hearing loss with appropriate accommodations and support, they *can* have success in a virtual environment. So as promised, here are some tips to help you and your student make the most of distance learning and come out a success.

Mary Catherine (29:24) So again I am take some a cues again from the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes who created a “Take Control of Your Online Learning” tip sheet. A few points that I think apply to students of all ages.

1. First and foremost make a plan – You need to know what accommodations are available for your online classes. Via captioning, via CART, via note takers. Also, making sure that you check in with your disability services coordinator and make sure that you are getting all of the support that is available.
2. It’s so important to have a dedicated space for learning and make sure that has good lighting in a quiet area. And make sure you have good internet connection and keep all of your technology charged for your classes.

Alle (30.13) Yes, a quiet area is key I can attest to that myself. Minimize background noise. Close windows and doors, move your child’s learning station away from noisy appliances like the dishwasher, the TV, or even washing machine things you normally don’t think about and ensure that other people’s conversation is kept to a minimum during distance learning times.

3. Make sure you’re staying in touch with the teachers. Make sure all of the materials that are providing are accessible and ask for extra time or alternative assignments where appropriate.

Alle (30:50) Exactly Mary Catherine. I would even say don’t be afraid to ask for assistance. Because we all needed especially during this time. While you can do all you can on your end— minimizing background noise for example ensuring that your child’s equipment is working properly—your child’s teacher can also take simple steps to make distance learning easier for your child. So these can be as easy as making sure that only one person speaks at a time ant that they say that, and using technology (such as Google Meet) that offers real-time captioning, and also sending written follow-ups that outline what was discussed and what is expected.

Mary Catherine (31:28)

4. In closing, don't underestimate the power of self-care during this time. We all need to be taking extra special care of ourselves. Take some time to exercise, meditate, disconnect from social media, watch a movie or just get an extra hour of sleep at night. "The struggle is real with the transition to online classes."

Alle (31:50) You are so right. Other things that may help:

-Don't forget to make their learning experience holistic. Having your kids home with you more often allows you to work on their communication skills as well and also their emotional intelligence very important.

-Keep to the same routines as you would if your child was physically going to school so get dressed, eat breakfast, etc. This I would think is especially important for the younger kids and again I can also attest to that.

-Make the most of assistive technology. If your child's hearing aid or cochlear implant is equipped with Bluetooth technology, use it! And investigate all other options. Even if you don't really know what that might be. Take the time to investigate it. We've mentioned some of the more common technologies already, but take the time to research. There's so much out there!

Mary Catherine (32:40) Let's just add one more thing, cause we were talking a little bit about the zoom because classed are offered in zoom and one of the things that has recently been updated in Zoom is the ability to pin multiple people so like for example if the teachers are talking and maybe there's a panel discussion as well you can actually pin multiple people to the screen now instead of only having one which does make it a little bit easier. I refer it a little bit as to "where is Waldo" like who's talking and how do you find them? So Zoom has improved that feature I don't know if that is the same as google meets but there are somethings that are recently implemented and some of the technology to make things a little bit easier. So to sum things up, remote learning for deaf or hard of hearing students is certainly not without challenges, but it can be navigated with the help of teachers, parents, and technology. The most important thing to remember is that advocating for yourself or for your children will help everyone with hearing loss live their best life. I hope that some of the things we've shared today will help.

Alle (33:53) Definitely and thank you again to Mickie and to Jennifer for sharing your experiences with us. I know that really meant a lot to us.

Mickie (34:01) I was happy to be here, thank you again for the opportunity and I just want my final thoughts would just be that as a parent you know your child better than anyone and we can offer to help them navigate the challenges they face. Whether is thru vocational rehab services or as it was mentioned their disability coordinator at their school or even directly with their professors themselves. I know from experience that helping my daughter you know with her strong communication skills and the strategies that she can employ that these definitely have a powerful impact in her self confidence and her ability to function and just be her best self.

Mary Catherine (34:48) That's fantastic!

Jennifer (34:50) Thank you very much for inviting me to join this. This is great information and I can't wait to share some of this information as well.

Mary Catherine (35:00): well, for further information on hearing health resources, please visit us online at oeius.org, again that's oeius.org and click on "Contact." And don't forget to join us next month for another informative episode of Have You Heard? A Listening Project. In the meantime, please don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out. I'm Mary Catherine (and I'm Alle), and we want to thank you for joining us today on the Have You Heard podcast. And remember to stay safe and stay connected!

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