



# Psychological support for families with cochlear implant decisions



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## **Why is there a clinical psychologist in the cochlear implant team?**

It is well recognised that considering the option of a cochlear implant for a child can have an emotional and psychological impact on the whole family and so it is important that patients and their families have access to appropriate support in managing this.

The clinical psychologist has an important role within the team to help minimise distress and can help parents to make sense of the different feelings that are common for parents during the cochlear implant assessment. The psychologist can liaise with the rest of the team, and sometimes external organisations, to ensure that the family receives the information and support that it requires.

## **What are common concerns for families considering the option of a cochlear implant?**

Parents may find themselves reflecting on their child's deafness and the impact that this has had on their family's life. For some parents, attending lots of different appointments may be logistically difficult and may feel tiring or intrusive. It is common for parents to wonder whether they are doing the right thing for their child. For example, they may wonder how their young child will feel about having an implant when they are older. Other parents, who feel certain that a cochlear implant is the best option for their child, may feel impatient and the assessment process may feel quite slow.

In some instances, one parent may have reservations about the option of a cochlear implant, while the other is keen to go ahead. This can sometimes cause tensions within the relationship and reaching an agreement may take time.

Sometimes parents may experience conflicting viewpoints from friends, family members or their community about what is the best thing for their child. All these factors can be stressful for parents going through the cochlear implant assessment process.

## How can the clinical psychologist help me or my child?

As part of the routine assessment of suitability for cochlear implants, parents meet with the clinical psychologist. The focus of this session is to explore your thoughts and feelings about the option of a cochlear implant. You may be asked about what you expect from a cochlear implant and you can have the opportunity to discuss any concerns or uncertainties. This is also an opportunity to reflect on feelings about a child's diagnosis of deafness as well as to consider other concerns about a child's behaviour or emotional well-being.

You may also meet the cochlear implant psychologist after your child has had cochlear implant surgery. The clinical psychologist can help you with behavioural or emotional concerns that are directly related to the cochlear implant. For example, parents may wish to speak to the psychologist about a child not wishing to wear the external parts of the cochlear implant device. If the team does not feel that a cochlear implant is an appropriate option for your child, you will be offered a meeting with the clinical psychologist to discuss feelings about this decision.

The clinical psychologist may spend time with your child during the initial assessment to observe their interaction and to assess their development. For children who are over four years old, the psychologist can carry out assessments of cognitive (thinking) skills using specialist tests. This can help to find out how cognitive abilities may be affecting a child's progress with speech and understanding. The clinical psychologist is also able to meet with young people during the assessment phase to help them talk through and make sense of complicated feelings about having a cochlear implant. This may be particularly valuable for adolescents.

## **What other roles does the clinical psychologist have within the cochlear implant team?**

The clinical psychologist has also been involved in organising and facilitating activity days for teenagers with cochlear implants. Other roles include providing teaching, training, liaising with cochlear implant psychologists nationwide, staff consultation and research.

## **What if I am not satisfied with the service that I receive?**

If you have concerns about the service you receive from the psychologist, please discuss these first with the psychologist or another member of the cochlear implant team. If this does not address your concerns, please contact the head of psychological health services, Sue Dolby. You can contact her by telephone on 0117 342 8168. Or you can call the patient support and complaints team, which can be reached on 0117 342 3604.

## **What happens to the information I share with the clinical psychologist?**

The clinical psychologist works as a member of the multidisciplinary team and communicates regularly with them to provide the best care. If there is reason to think that there is a risk of harm to you or others, this information may need to be passed on to other people. The psychologist will talk to you about this first whenever possible.

If there is something that you tell the psychologist that you do not want them to share with anyone other than their supervisor, please let them know. We will always try to make sure that that information is then kept private or confidential.



Please note that if for any reason you would value a second opinion concerning your diagnosis or treatment, you are entirely within your rights to request this.

The first step would usually be to discuss this with the doctor or other lead clinician who is responsible for your care.

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