

# Cochlear Family

KEEPING YOU SUPPORTED, CONNECTED, INSPIRED

## PLAYING BY EAR

How music could help your child's  
speech and language skills.

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# Hear My Story

Facing life's challenges with courage

By Sharon C



Sharon C

Cochlear Family's "Hear My Story" feature, gives our recipients a platform to share their hearing story using their own words. Meet Sharon from Taiwan - Her story of quiet bravery gives voice to the vulnerabilities of growing up with hearing loss and how the support of her family gave her the strength to face life's challenges with courage.

**F**ROM CHILDHOOD, I have always known the all-encompassing love of my parents. I did not grow up in an affluent household; my father supported the family by working at a recycling plant. However, my parents did everything they could to support me on my hearing journey. My father often took time off work to take me to the doctors and my mother would buy expensive supplements in the hope that my hearing would improve.

Due to repetitive ear infections,

In the 10th grade, I woke up feeling like the world was spinning around me. I could not walk straight, and I lost my hearing completely.

visits to the ENT clinic constituted a large part of my childhood memories. By the time I was in middle school, my hearing had deteriorated to a moderate hearing loss. It became obvious that I could not hear well in class, so I was fitted with a hearing aid. Although I wore it regularly, I still remember getting punished in English class because I couldn't hear well

during the dictation quiz.

In the 10th grade, I woke up feeling like the world was spinning around me. I could not walk straight, and I lost my hearing completely. My father drove all across Taiwan, seeking medical treatment from many different doctors. Over and over again, doctors told me there was nothing they could do to restore my hearing. My fear of not being able to hear again was overwhelming. I still remember hiding in the school bathrooms or crawling into bed and hiding underneath my blanket to cry. The idea that my future might be without sound, left me with a heavy heart and a feeling of helplessness.

When I was in the 12th grade, a friend of mine studying nursing sent me an article featuring my doctor being interviewed about cochlear implantation. It was a time when doctors had just started learning about cochlear implants and the ▶

◀ candidacy criteria was extremely strict. I was not a candidate for cochlear implantation, but it didn't bother me. I had learned to accept that I may not hear for the rest of my life. I went back to school that day and continued preparing for the college entrance exam. In April of that year, I found out that I got into a national university and I was so happy.

Before starting university, I was advised that I was now a suitable candidate for a cochlear implant. I didn't expect much from the cochlear implant, but my parents wanted me to try. So, I simply complied with them and a surgery date was scheduled. After my incision had healed, I went in for my switch-on appointment. To be completely honest, I was more concerned about my shaved head and I wasn't really moved by the sounds I could hear again.

University began soon after I had my cochlear implant. I was still adjusting to new sounds and had a hard time understanding my professors, especially when the content was delivered interchangeably between Mandarin and English. On top of that, I was still learning how to navigate university life and make new friends. My difficulty hearing led to a few misunderstandings. But over time, thanks to my love of chatting with people, I made many close friends and my university life went rather smoothly.

Time flies, I have been a cochlear implant recipient for over 23 years and in 2018, I made the important decision to get a second implant. It was a completely different experience. I realised how much the surgical technique had improved over the last 20 years; I didn't need to shave my entire head, just a tiny patch. Also, my auditory rehab in the past consisted of talking with my parents and listening to the radio. Now, I work with my hearing therapist on a formal rehab plan that has been tailored just for me.

Since becoming a mother, I have come to realise the love parents have

for their children. As my parents did for me, I would do anything for my daughter. Now that my daughter is in 2nd grade, she understands my hearing loss, and it warms my heart every time she tries to help me. For example, when buying things from a store, she always repeats the price after the sales assistant says it. And when we're walking on the street, she always pulls me to the side to avoid passing traffic.

A cochlear implant does not restore normal hearing, but it has allowed me to experience a world of rich and beautiful sound. It has helped me to achieve all that I have set out to achieve in life; go to university, connect with loved ones, hear my daughter's voice

and be able to secure my dream job.

It was important for me to tell my story, because what I have learnt is that every recipient's experience can help more people understand the benefits and challenges of having a cochlear implant. Through sharing our experiences, we can cheer each other on and take comfort in the fact that we have each other on our hearing journey.


My family used abundant love to demonstrate their care for me and taught me that love can make people stronger. I plan to carry on this tradition with my daughter, friends, and family to show them that kindness and connection has the power to help us face life's challenges with courage. ●

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**Sharon C. is touched by her daughter's support, "when buying things from a store, she always repeats the price after the sales assistant says it. And when we're walking on the street, she always pulls me to the side to avoid passing traffic".**





Music is Felix's passion; he plays electric and acoustic guitar, writes his own songs and loves to regularly jam with his dad.

# How music could help

## your child's speech and language skills

**W**HILE HANGING out on family holiday, then seven-year-old Felix W had an encounter with a musical instrument that changed his life. "It was a simple ukulele that captured Felix's attention and inspired him to start guitar," said Felix's mum Jo. "His Dad would pick up the uke and play it to everyone on that trip. He had fun

with it and Felix saw the fun to be had if you just learnt a few chords."

Now aged 10, music is Felix's passion; he plays electric and acoustic guitar, writes his own songs and loves to regularly jam with his dad.

But music may be playing an even bigger role in Felix's life. Research suggests that enhancing the environment with music,

can help to improve speech perception and hearing in children with cochlear implants<sup>1</sup>.

The research identifies a wide variety of activities as being beneficial including singing, dancing and playing with musical instruments.

Jo has no doubt that musical activities have helped Felix, who has bilateral [Cochlear™ Nucleus® 7](#) ▶

◀ **Sound Processors**, develop his language skills.

"I think it has given him the ability to tune in and focus his hearing in a fun and engaging way. He has learnt to focus to hear a melody within a piece of music, or to hear lyrics in a song," she said.

According to research, musical activities improve the ability to enjoy pitch and rhythm, which are important early steps to understand and develop spoken language<sup>1</sup>.

The authors of a review article published in the internationally recognised journal, *Hearing Research*, felt the results were so powerful, they concluded that "the current evidence seems enough to urge speech therapists, music therapists, music teachers, parents, and children and adolescents with hearing impairments and/or cochlear implants to start using music for enhancing speech and language skills"<sup>1</sup>.

#### Here are some tips from the researchers to help you get started:

### 1 Begin as soon as you can

Children can benefit from musical activities even before implantation of their cochlear implant – the earlier the better as the brain is most adaptable before four years of age.

"We always had music around. Even before Felix's implants and knowing he couldn't hear, we would put him near musical vibrations," said Jo. "I would sing lullabies with him on my chest or lay him on the piano while we played."

### 2 Dance and use body movements in the rhythm of the music

The research shows that dancing to music helps children with cochlear implants to learn lyrics, get to grips with intonation and improve perception of speech. Let your body movements reflect the style

"I think it has given him the ability to tune in and focus his hearing in a fun and engaging way. He has learnt to focus to hear a melody within a piece of music, or to hear lyrics in a song," Jo, Felix's mum

of the music (fast or slow, happy or sad) to help your child learn the rhythm and beat of music, which are both important for the perception of speech.

### 3 Use your own singing as your main instrument

The *Hearing Research* authors suggest this can help improve speech perception.

### 4 Use several musical instruments

Playing an instrument may be more effective than listening only, the *Hearing Research* review suggests, so let your child try different musical instruments.

"We always had a box of percussion toys when Felix was tiny. We bought small violins that we weren't too precious about, and recorders, triangles and xylophones," said Jo.

### 5 Sing and play the same songs repeatedly

Repetition helps us to remember sounds and what words should sound like. Over the course of the repetitions, the brain makes the sound more and more precise.

Singing the same songs will help your child grasp the tune and meaning of the words.

### 6 Take turns

Use songs which include turn-taking. Give your child the opportunity to continue the song when you stop singing or sing a short section of a song and have your child repeat it. This allows your child to listen, to produce speech sounds, and to compare your speech with their own.

### 7 Get the family involved

Involving everyone encourages music around your home, with plenty of repetition and opportunities to listen to and make music.

Jo says this can also be bonding for Felix and his dad: "This is a beautiful way to connect. They practise together most days. Dad can play the guitar with him and he also takes on the singing role, showing Felix that it's ok to be out of your comfort zone."

### 8 Encourage life with music

"We made a specific point of listening to music while incorporating it into playing. We danced together, or bashed pans together, or had music playing while relaxing on the floor," said Jo.

She suggests starting simply: "We used baby CDs that just had one instrument playing a simple melody of something lyrical. We tried nursery rhymes set to different music, then we moved to ABBA and the Beatles and then some '80s rock." ●

#### Reference:

1. Torppa R, Huotilainen M. Why and how music can be used to rehabilitate and develop speech and language skills in hearing-impaired children. *Hearing Research* 2019; 380: 108–122.

Find out more about direct streaming and Cochlear's range of wireless accessories



We share how Ayumi, a mother from Japan helped to prepare her 9-year old daughter Kanade for her first day at school.

# School Selection?

It's not always textbook.

**P**REPARED A CHILD with hearing loss for success at school can be a daunting prospect for many parents.

With most schools returning to some semblance of normality, we share how Ayumi, a mother from Japan helped to prepare her 9-year old daughter Kanade for her first day at school.

We also share the steps Ayumi took to select the right school for her bilaterally implanted daughter to ensure that she receives a well-rounded education.

## SCHOOL SELECTION

The choice of school can have a significant bearing on the quality of your child's education. Several factors come into play when deciding on the right school for your child, such as location, size of the classroom, programs, curriculum and facilities.

Before making a decision, Ayumi recommends doing plenty of research – both online and in person.

Ayumi went to the schools herself to check out the facilities and spoke with the principal and teachers.

"I chose an elementary school that had a 'classroom for deaf children' provided by the government," Ayumi said. "Kanade goes to the 'classroom for deaf children' once a week after school and sometimes a learning support teacher will spend more time with her if time permits."

"The curriculum and learning plans in 'hearing class' are tailor-made for Kanade's needs. So, in Kanade's case, the classroom for deaf children had lessons focused on building social skills, such as attentive listening and ▶

◀ how to adopt different roles during conversation, rather than language pronunciation skills.”

Another important consideration was the transport links between school and home. “I chose a school that Kanade could easily and confidently commute to by herself,” said Ayumi

### GET TO KNOW THE TEACHERS AND STAFF

Once Ayumi decided on the school that was right for Kanade, she met once again with the principal and spoke about how best to manage her daughter’s hearing loss and how to optimise her learning at school.

“Two days before the school entrance ceremony, I spoke to the Principal, Dean of Students, and all of Kanade’s teachers including *the classroom for deaf children* teacher. I wanted to ensure Kanade would not have lessons in noisy environments, such as a classroom near the music room,” said Ayumi.

“I also wanted the FM system to be used not only by the teachers in the classroom but also by teachers who speak in big assembly meetings in the auditorium.”

### PREPARATION FOR YOUR CHILD

Your child may be nervous or excited ahead of their first day of school. This is understandable as they are about to go through an array of new experiences. Familiarising your child with their hearing device and teaching them how to advocate for their hearing needs will leave them more confident as they enter the next phase of their lives.

Just like Ayumi taught Kanade how to replace the batteries in her sound processor before entering kindergarten, she also gave her guidance on how to talk about her hearing loss. “On her first day, I asked the school to give Kanade an opportunity to introduce herself to her classmates and explain her hearing loss,” said Ayumi. Ayumi taught Kanade how to:

1. Explain her cochlear implant to classmates and teachers, and how it helps her to hear.
2. Be brave and ask for help if she cannot hear something in class.
3. Switch on and operate her FM system or other hearing accessories independently.
4. Ask teachers to switch on the FM system or other hearing accessories when it is off.

### HOBBIES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Ayumi believes that allowing your child to experience a variety of different hearing environments is very beneficial to their hearing development and social confidence.

As a Cochlear implant recipient, Kanade has experienced a myriad of extra-curricular activities. Her current hobbies include camping, girl scouts, painting and playing the piano.

Ayumi’s preparation for these activities is similar to the schoolyard:

“Meet with coaches or teachers beforehand, so you can speak about your child’s hearing and cochlear implant. It may be easier for teachers to understand your child’s hearing needs and cochlear implant when you explain it in person,” said Ayumi. ●

## Cochlear Family Starting School Toolkit

For more information on how to prepare your child for school and resources you can share with teachers, click on the links below to download our Starting School guides.

- 1 [Practical advice for Parents Guide](#)
- 2 [Practical advice for Teachers Guide](#)
- 3 [Starting School Checklist](#)
- 4 [Sound Start for School Rehab Guide](#)
- 5 [Introduction to Cochlear Implants and Wireless Pairing](#)
- 6 [Introduction to Baha® Sound Processors and Wireless Pairing](#)



Playing the piano is one of Kanade’s extra-curricular activities





# 10 min daily exercises

## for your ears

**H**EARING REHABILITATION is an important part of the hearing journey that can help you get the most out of your implant. It can help reintroduce sounds that you may have forgotten about or build hearing and listening skills.

We've put together some simple rehab exercises that you can start doing at home to help develop and improve your hearing confidence.

### EXERCISES: LEVEL I\*

1. Wear your sound processor, even if you are at home by yourself.

- This is the first step to gaining and regaining hearing capabilities.
2. Watch TV or online media with the captions on and listen to the words as you read them.
  3. Read newspaper or other print aloud and pay close attention to what you are reading. If there is someone helping you with rehab, try turning this into a tracking exercise – they read and stop at random points, then you point out where they stopped reading.
  4. Listen to an audiobook while following along with the book and focus on the words you are hearing.

### EXERCISES: LEVEL II\*

1. Watch TV with captions, or stream audio on your computer, tablet or mobile device with captions on. Try closing your eyes occasionally to practice listening without visual information to help. Remember this is a listening exercise, and it will take more focus and effort. So, take breaks if you are feeling tired.
2. Listen to a talk show on the radio or to a podcast. ▶



◀ **EXERCISES: LEVEL III**

1. Explore making video calls using Skype or FaceTime so you receive visual cues and can see people's faces. Start with making with video calls to familiar conversational partners to build your confidence in this area. Once you become more confident, arrange to have video calls with less familiar conversational partners.
2. Once you are feeling more comfortable with listening over video calls, try moving onto standard phone calls. Start by making these calls in a quiet room and then increase difficulty by introducing some background noise into the space. You can use a radio or turn on the television. Practice speaking with familiar conversational partners when you first introduce background noise. Then move onto less familiar conversational partners.
3. If you have a **Cochlear™ Mini Microphone**, try having a conversation using this accessory and ensure background noise is present.
4. Listen to an audiobook without the book to follow. To make this task harder, practice listening to a narrator with an accent.
5. Listen to a TED Talk without captions.
6. Watch YouTube or online videos of your favourite musicians, turn on closed captioning and follow along with the song lyrics. Start with songs you are familiar with. To increase the difficulty, listen without captions or try listening to a cover version of the same song. Also, try listening to new genres of music so you can familiarise yourself with different tones, instruments and beats.

*\* Continue these exercises until ease of listening moves from maximum difficulty to moderate or minimal difficulty. If you are not sure about how you are progressing and what might be achievable for you, reach out to your clinician about making sure you have realistic goals and expectations for your situation.*

Explore making video calls using Skype or FaceTime so you get visual cues and can see people's faces. Start with making with video calls to familiar conversational partners to build your confidence in this area.



For more hearing tips and links to other Cochlear rehab resources, read our [Cochlear Family Guide to Adult Rehab at Home.](#)

# CochlearFamily

## Keeping you connected and supported

To our Cochlear Family thank you for taking care, staying calm and being safe during these uncertain times. We are still contactable and available to assist with your enquiries and support needs, just get in touch with one of our helpful Customer Service team members by emailing **[customerservice@cochlear.com](mailto:customerservice@cochlear.com)**



## Hear now. And always

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 have the industry's best clinical, research and support networks.

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

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 the instructions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear technology.



Cochlear®

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Baha implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderate to profound hearing loss.

Cochlear™ Nucleus® implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderately severe to profound hearing loss.



[www.cochlear.com](http://www.cochlear.com)

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