

## **Mothers: Starting to Use Cued Speech at Home**

**Linda Balderson from Maryland, Isabelle Payonk from North Carolina,  
and Gail Hartman from Ohio**

**Isabelle Payonk:** We started to cue when Andy was two-and-a-half years old. I cued *everything!*

**Linda Balderson:** We started to cue with Tiffany when she was twenty months old. She has a lot of additional issues; she has CHARGE Syndrome. My husband and I learned to cue together – that is important.

**Gail Hartman:** Christine was diagnosed when she was eight months old. We started in a total communication program, then began cueing when she was two-years-old.

**Facilitator:** What was most helpful when you learned Cued Speech, what was most detrimental, and how did you first introduce cueing to your children?

**Isabelle Payonk:** The most helpful thing that we did was to build a family and community of cuers. My whole family, including my parents and my husband's mother went to the Gallaudet Learning Vacation and learned to cue. We also took along another family so we were building a community of support.

My two hearing children learned how to cue as I was using it, in baby steps along with them. My son did not learn to cue until he was seven-years-old and my daughter did not learn until she was ten-years-old.

I would get down on Andy's level and cue. He would eventually watch and we went from there. He did not watch right away, but that was okay.

Deaf education professionals were detrimental when we were learning to cue.

**Linda Balderson:** The most helpful thing for us was that someone came to our house for four evenings and taught my husband and I together. It also helped that I was an at-home mom and I cued all day.

My husband did not have as much time to practice cueing. He would pick up a magazine at his office at lunch and practice cueing a paragraph. He took a tape recorder in the car and listened to the lessons while he drove to work.

The most difficult aspect of learning to cue was that we did not know that our daughter had other complicating factors besides her hearing loss. Her progress was pretty slow and it was hard to keep going, especially once we taught other people to cue and their kids were learning much faster than her.

I did not insist that my other children cue and looking back I wish I had insisted. We learned to cue in 1975 and there were no programs, no camps, no Gallaudet learning vacations; we were kind of on our own. That is one of the reasons I started a camp, because I felt it was important for families to get support. To teach my kids to cue would have meant me teaching them. They now know how to cue, but they do not cue often.

**Gail Hartman:** Both my husband and I took a course over ten weeks. We were on our own. The Cued Speech instructor would call me and encourage me to cue. We also went to a camp, which was very helpful.

One difficult thing about learning to cue – while I was at camp someone used me as an example of how not to cue. I felt really bad. The other thing that was hard to deal with was deaf education professionals who thought we should be using sign exclusively and audiologists who thought we should be using the auditory-verbal approach. I tended to look for people who were neutral.

**Facilitator:** What was the very first step you took in introducing Cued Speech to your deaf child and how did you build support for speech audition, language, and literacy. What is your final wisdom about teaching parents?

**Isabelle Payonk:** Words of wisdom – language, language, language. We need to make sure these kids have language or they will not have knowledge.

**Linda Balderson:** At twenty months, my daughter was only crawling and had no eye contact. Since she had no eye contact, I crawled around with her. When she tried to say a word, I cued it. We cued single words at first, but I always tried to stretch her language, so that I could be one step above her.

The best thing I did was to have another child two-and-a-half years later. I used him as her language model. When he came home and was saying words, I figured she needed to know that, too. I watched his language and used it to make sure she was getting that same information.

How did we build support for speech audition, language, literacy, and communication? We fought to have our school system put cueing in. We started with three families and now we have the biggest three-track program in the United States. We have more than forty kids cueing from preschool through high school. That is the best thing we did.

Wisdom about teaching parents – be positive. I never say anything bad about other methods, and in fact, I think other systems may work well for other families. Cueing just happened to work well for our family.

My daughter went to the National Technical Institute of the Deaf (NTID) for three years and now has a full-time job in a day-care center. She has a cochlear implant and no one at her job cues to her but she speaks and people understand her. So she has more than passed any expectations that any professionals had.

We made a difference – we would not give up on cueing, even though everyone said we should not cue to her because no one thought she could learn it, but she has done really well.

**Gail Hartman:** I feel fortunate that I have a background in special education because that gave me some background to help Christine. I also used our older daughter as a model; what she was doing at a certain age was what I wanted Christine to be able to do at that age.

It is important to give parents an idea of how to work with their children on language.