

Fathers: Talking about Learning and Using Cued Speech

Phil Payonk from North Carolina and Rick Hartman from Ohio

Rick Hartman: I think the most important thing in choosing, learning and using Cued Speech is the desire to do the right thing. My lack of knowledge of the deaf community and what to do with a child who is deaf slowed the progress of my decision.

Phil Payonk: Wisdom, first. We can say three things: people, process, and language.

People: I was lucky that I didn't have to do this all by myself. It takes a community. It takes a group of parents. It takes professionals. We couldn't have done all this without the help of a lot of people.

Process or tools: Cued Speech is a wonderful tool. It really works. Use that tool. If you don't use tools, they won't work for you. There are other tools out there. You have to become aware of all the tools in your tool chest to work with this deaf kid.

And finally, language: That's the real key. People focus on speech. They focus on decibel loss and all that kind of stuff. Language is what we need to focus on.

Facilitator: How did you feel the first time you cued to your child and how did you approach it?

Rick Hartman: Poorly. And proud of myself for trying.

Phil Payonk: It's been so long ago, I can't remember. I'm a dad and we do things like sons and dads do. We do soccer, building stuff, the regular stuff. It's not like we did anything different. And if you use the tools you have, like Cued Speech, you can do that.

Facilitator: What would you say to teachers that are preparing to teach new dads? What should they do special, if anything, for fathers?

Rick Hartman: Go slow. It takes time.

Phil Payonk: I would encourage them to involve fathers. We don't involve our dads.

Maybe that's the fathers' faults. Sometimes we fathers work too much and are away, but we have to be involved with these kids or they lose a lot. Teachers could focus on things that dads do, like baseball, soccer, and fishing.

Facilitator: Are you saying to include sports vocabulary in Cued Speech classes?

Phil Payonk: Sure. Whatever works to get the dads involved. The kids may listen more, too. I know the boys will, maybe the girls, too. Make it real for them.

Facilitator: Any other thoughts?

Rick Hartman: Cued Speech has worked very well for my daughter.

Phil Payonk: Deaf education professionals who don't know what they are talking about really make me mad and also people that judge people based on what they think they know rather than what people can do. Some people aren't aware and aren't knowledgeable about their subject matter and are professed to be experts at it. I don't like that.

Question: Do you think it's better for moms and dads to have separate classes, or is it better for them to be together when they are first learning Cued Speech?

Phil Payonk: Maybe the moms are smarter or they're more aware of the needs of their kids, but moms dominate the classes and dads will sit back and not do anything. So I think you do have to separate them so that they will grow. It's almost like the old arguments for women's colleges, but it's reversed.

Rick Hartman: I agree.

Facilitator: Interesting. I think we just have been given a new direction and that is to create a course for males that has lots of sports vocabulary, and what about cars and tools?

Phil Payonk: Boat building, bike riding, skeet shooting. All that stuff.