No Difference

A MinneStory™

Amy shares with her son's audiologist, Linda, how she takes everyday moments to educate others in order to normalize AJ's hearing loss.

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Linda: Do people – when you're out in public – do they every comment on his hearing aids? And how do you react and how does he react?

Amy: Um, that's been a progressive situation. I remember in the very beginning, people would say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. How long have you known he was deaf?" And I would, you know, inside, choke it down, because as a new mom, you know, and going through this myself in the moment, I know they didn't understand how their words affected me. But I would choke it down and I would say, "Oh, since he was born, and he's just fine. Please don't feel sorry for him." He'll be fine, you know. And then, as he's gotten older, we experience more so children pointing it out; at a younger age, more toddler, they'd walk up and they'd stick their fingers to his ears. "What are those things? What's that?" And I quickly came up with a solution. The parents tend to, you know, you say, "Don't say anything." "Don't look at that person if they're in a wheelchair." You know, that's how most parents are, like "Please don't say anything." You just hope your child isn't going to say anything. Well, their child says something. The parent's at a loss for words. And I just say, "So, what do you use your ears for?" And the child is naturally going to say, "Hearing." And I would say, "Well, so does he, but his ears need a little help. So he wears these. They're called hearing aids to help his ears work better, like yours." And it's clear as a bell. They understand then as a child. I remember at our six-month follow-up, coming to see you, walking out into the parking ramp to get into the car with him. And, he had done well at six months on his hearing evaluation. And just a release happened, right then and there before I even cranked the car, and I realized that, you know, my son wears hearing aids, but your child wears glasses. And there's no difference. Your child's eyes need help, and my child's ears need help. There is no difference. There is no stigma in that.

Linda: And we're all different. But he definitely has a can-do attitude.

Amy For sure. For sure. And he can. And he will. (Laughing) I love that about him. And even to this day, he says cute things, like the word caterpillar is "caka picker". And that's just how he hears it. We can work on it, and after a few times he practices, he can get it right when we break it into chunks, but "caka picker" – that's what we get. And my husband is just – he's the best dad ever, you know. He'll repeat it just like that, "Do you see that caka picker?" And the look I have to give that poor man. "Please don't reinforce him saying the word the wrong way." We're always on. We always have to be on, and there's just going to be a lot of funny, cute things that they say and that they do because that's just what makes this part unique, you know. Enjoy those things. Don't feel bad about them.

Linda: Well, you've been such a wonderful advocate for AJ since the beginning. You and your husband have been so supportive, and celebrated every accomplishment of his. I remember testing him in the room. You would light up when he would, you know, understand the task and respond to it, and learn, and just show how smart he was. You've done a good job.

Amy: Ohhh, thank you.

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