

Part I:

Background Information

Kindergarten Teacher with Hearing Loss

BACKGROUND

Lucy*, age 27, has a progressive hearing loss in her left ear and a sensor neural profound loss in her right ear as a result of meningitis at age 3. She is able to hear at about 60dB in an office setting with her left ear, using a behind the ear hearing aide, but is very self-conscious about it being seen by others.

Lucy is single and receives little support from her family regarding her hearing loss. Her family’s attitude has always been one of “just learn to deal with it” and this has required numerous psychological adjustments. It has been necessary for her to work through the maze of dealing with the progressive hearing loss primarily on her own, although fortunately she has friends who have been a good support network. Socially, however, she is beginning to withdraw from situations that force her to interact with people she doesn’t know due to the fact it has become hard for her to understand voice patterns she is not familiar with. Lucy is a Kindergarten Teacher at a private religious school but is reluctant to seek help from her coworkers or to ask for any adaptive devices.

One of Lucy’s friends suggested she contact the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR) as she had met several people at Self Help for the Hard of Hearing (SHHH) meetings who had successful cochlear implants. Lucy was interested to learn if she would be a candidate for an implant and to see if the counselor had suggestions on how to perform her occupation in a more comfortable and efficient fashion. Georgia DVR can provide services to client’s who are working but in need of some assistance to address employment issues related to their disability, under the Maintenance of Competitive Employment Program.

FUNCTIONAL CAPACITIES/ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

Lucy has noticed it is getting increasingly more difficult for her to understand what students and coworkers are saying in noisy environments. She has trouble speaking with a student’s parents on the office phone and tries to delay such calls until she gets home, where she has a volume control adaptive device. Since normal speech falls in the decibel range of 30-50 dB, the first problem Lucy noticed was not hearing voices at a high pitch or octave level. In a quiet setting the impact is minimal, however in a classroom or playground setting Lucy has difficulty. Since children have higher pitched voices than adults and have trouble speaking one person at a time, this setting is challenging for Lucy. Lucy can still understand a child when only one conversation is held, when a child is not whispering, and when she can see a child’s lips.

JOB DESCRIPTION

A Kindergarten Teacher instructs children from 4 to 6 years old in elemental natural and social science, personal hygiene, music, art, and literature, to promote their physical, mental and social development. Supervision of activities such as field trips, group discussions and dramatic play-acting is required, stimulating students' interest in and broadening understanding of their physical and social environment. A teacher discusses students' problems and progress with parents, assists with playground and lunchroom supervision, and attends faculty meetings.

Essential Functions of the Job

1. Prepare lesson plans, typically using curriculum specified by the school. Includes selection of assistive learning tools and aides such as music, drama, films, computers, etc.
2. Provide clear instruction on subject with follow up assignments such as completion of work sheets, hands on learning activities, artwork, and experiments to reinforce subject matter.
3. Lead group discussions, using teaching skills and techniques to keep small children from interrupting or dominating the conversation.
4. Provide one on one instruction during follow up activities.
5. Lead children in music, drama and art to supplement education in basic educational skills.
6. Assist children in self-care and personal hygiene.
7. Attend weekly faculty staff meeting.
8. Contact parents for conferences, either in person or over the phone, to discuss child's progress and any areas of concern.

EMPLOYER CONSIDERATIONS

A private secular school employs Lucy and the Headmaster has confidence that she can handle dealing with the children, parents and faculty in an effective way. However, as Lucy's hearing worsens an increased focus is on liability. Questions have been raised whether Lucy can maintain her effectiveness as a teacher as well as continue to safely supervise the children in all settings, especially on the playground. The school values Lucy but communication must be open as her hearing loss progresses. Her counselor notes concern that Lucy is starting to show the observable patterns of someone with more pronounced hearing loss by the gradual withdrawal process in dealing with others and not sharing her concerns with the employer, as demonstrated by not asking for a volume control unit on the office phone. She states that if Lucy is comfortable and open in dealing with the hearing loss the employer will likely be more open as well. It is critical that Lucy be an advocate for accommodations necessary to allow continued performance of her position.

The employer is also concerned about the potential cost of accommodations, especially as the loss progresses. They are not sure what their medical plan will cover and how much will be out of pocket for the employer and Lucy.

