

Foreword

Marlee Matlin

WHEN I SEE and meet deaf children and their families, I often observe how they interact together, and I especially note how, or even if, communication is happening. Does it seem to be happening naturally and spontaneously? Is there a bit of a struggle, but the parents are making a good effort to help their child understand? Or is there very little communication happening at all? The first two situations are always good to see; however, when little or no communication is taking place, I see a tragedy happening before my eyes, because a deaf child is being deprived of the chance to learn language. I doubt it is because the parents don't care. Most parents love their children. Perhaps it may be because the parents have no idea how or what to do. If you are a parent who wishes to know the "how" and "what" and wants the best for their deaf child, you have come to the right place: the Silent Garden. It is actually a very vibrant and colorful place, with much going on to see and enjoy. This is the kind of place where all deaf children and their families will thrive and grow together.

It is rare to find an academic who is committed to writing for everyday folks rather than exclusively for scholars and professionals. It is even more rare to find deaf academics, but thanks to improvements in communication access over the years, their ranks are growing. Two of them who you will meet here, authors Paul Ogden and Dave Smith, have stated that their philosophy is to get information to the people who need it the most—the parents of

deaf and hard of hearing children. Four characteristics make this book a radical departure from other works in the field of deaf education. The authors both are deaf, whereas most literature on parenting is written by hearing professionals; they use their personal experiences and understanding of being deaf as their reference point in discussing the special needs and problems of deaf children from birth to age twenty one; they include findings from interviews with more than 350 parents of deaf children as well as discussions with at least 500 deaf adults as an additional reservoir of experience from which to draw; and the book's overall purpose is to channel the knowledge and expertise available to academics and professionals to nonacademic audiences and primarily parents. This information may often be lost along the way due to the technical language in which it is often presented, in addition to the stress of the moment that parents are experiencing. What is needed is straightforward guidance in resolving the inevitable issues that come up and in making the necessary decisions. The authors have provided it here.

Dr. Ogden and Dr. Smith proceed with the understanding that a deaf child is not merely "a deaf person," but a complete and complex human being who happens to be deaf. The distinction is subtle but important. Historically, deaf children have been treated as having deficiencies merely because they cannot hear or speak well. Often, they have poor literacy outcomes as part of a self-fulfilling prophecy with low expectations for achievement. But the authors make it clear that children who are deaf, when provided full access to communication and taught to partake of the full range of human experience, have the potential to lead productive and ultimately independent lives. The authors themselves are a living testimony to the kind of potential that deaf individuals can reach, given good parenting and a good education. Dr. Ogden, although retired from California State University, Fresno, with the honored title of professor emeritus, is still active in promoting effective practices in raising and educating deaf children. He still travels to meet with parents and their children throughout the United States, a rare venture for an academic. Dr. Smith is the director of the Center on Deafness at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Dr. Ogden and Dr. Smith's work strikes an ideal bal-

ance of achievement, between teaching students and writing for and working with parents and professionals in the language each is comfortable using.

It is my hope that you find this book a useful companion on your own personal journey with your deaf child and family through the real silent garden that you cultivate in your home and in the Deaf community. Yours will be one more successful deaf child and family that I can delight in and not worry and wonder about. Who knows, your child could even be the next deaf Academy Award or even Nobel Prize winner. Nothing is impossible with good communication and literacy skills. But the bottom line is that just knowing there is another happy stroller in the silent garden of life would be wonderful. Get ready for an interesting adventure and great outcomes!