Closing the Gap: Socioeconomic Status and Hearing Inequality

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Abstract

For children who are deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) to learn to listen and talk, they need consistent, optimal access to sound (LSL, 2022). This is achieved using properly fit hearing technology (CIs, HAs, etc.). It has been found that individuals of lower socio-economic status (SES) have less access to hearing technology, less knowledge about the device use, and subsequently poorer listening/spoken language outcomes than their more affluent counterparts. Speech-language pathologists who serve these children and families must learn the specific needs of each client and their family for the most effective outcome. Regardless of socioeconomic status or background, parents play a major role in the development of their children. For children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), parent involvement is vital to ensure children consistently use their hearing technology in order to develop listening and spoken language skills. It is important that practitioners support low SES parents by using appropriate language, provide models of device use, and emphasize the importance of wearing the hearing device in all settings. Thus, families from low SES backgrounds can benefit from the support of practitioners, including speech language pathologists (SLPs), who provide information and resources to achieve consistent device use.

Socioeconomic Staus + Access and distribution to resources = Inequality

Why does SES matter?

Socioeconomic status and its relationship to children's development is a topic that is continued to be researched. There is a general agreement that inequities exist in both access and distribution of resources across socioeconomic levels. SES is a pervasive predictor of child development which leads to an impact on their success academically. It is estimated that in the United States, approximately 22% of all children live in poverty and represent the extreme of the SES distribution (Tavernise, 2011).

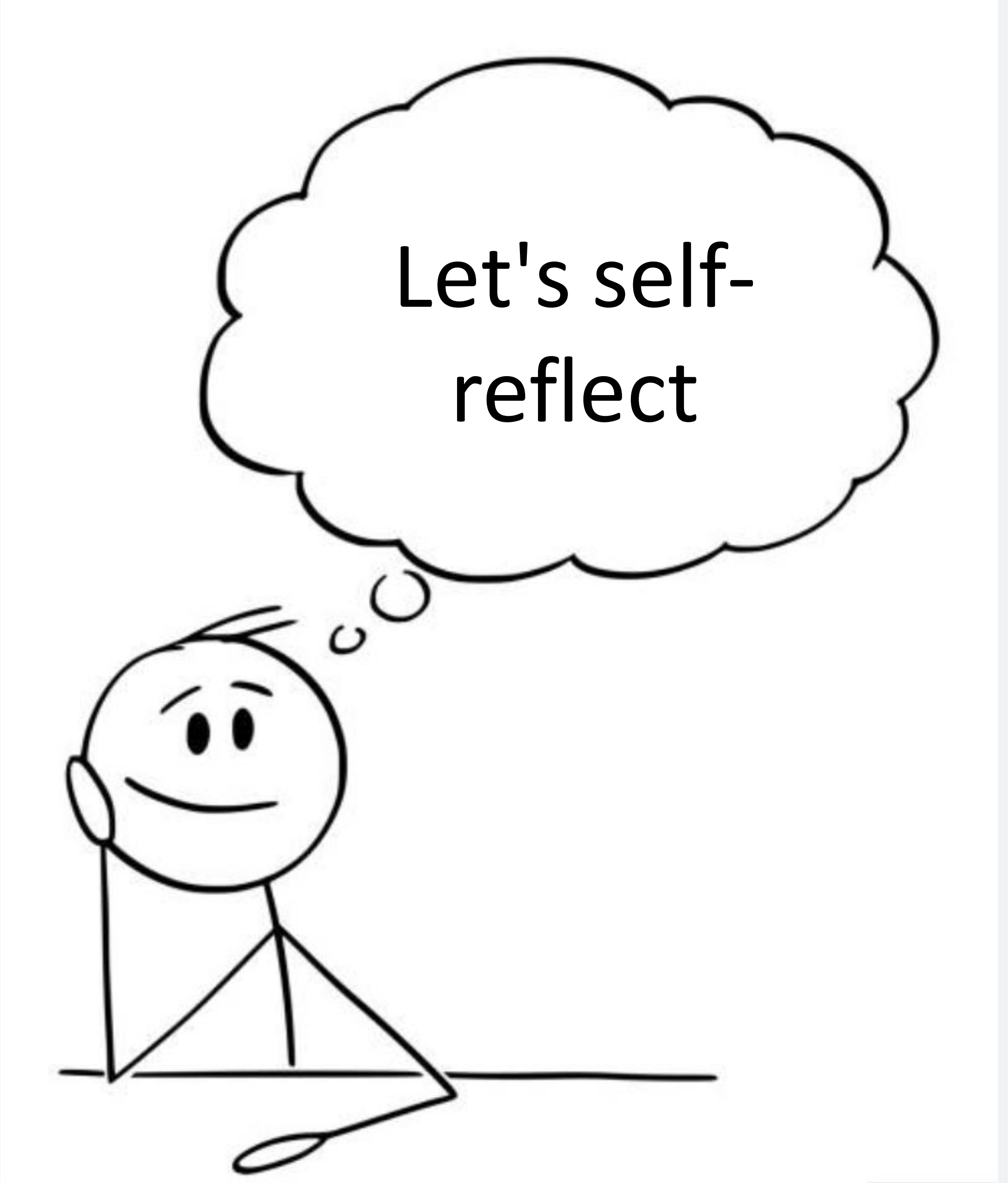
References:

Factors that challenge families of low SES:

- Barriers in accessing treatment
- Cost of treatment
- Lack of access to treatment in area
- Long waitlists and unavailability of services
- Lack of timely and/or appropriate advice from primary care physicians and pediatricians
- Inadequate advertising of SLP services
- Difficulty verbally communicating concerns

What can professionals do:

- Provide families with information about their rights
- Ensure appropriate language and terminology is being used
- Provide demonstrations of how to use technology (model)
- Provide families with additional resources (e.g., support groups).
- Be comfortable with saying "I don't know enough about that" and follow up with additional information
- Practice cultural responsiveness
- Provide family-centered intervention
- Establish parent-professional partnerships
- Learn more about cultures that differ from your own
- Collaborate with other professionals
- Allow time for families to ask questions



What steps are you taking to ensure you are meeting the needs of and providing support to each family/client?

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