

Connect & Discover: Technology that Goes Beyond Dr Tina Childress AuD

In a world where communication is paramount, ensuring accessibility for all is not just a matter of inclusivity; it's a necessity. Dr. Tina Childress, a deaf audiologist who uses cochlear implants, and a self-declared "Communication Access Engineer," delivered a very engaging presentation titled "Connect & Discover: Technology that Goes Beyond." In this enlightening hour, Dr. Childress delved deep into the realm of hearing assistive technology, shedding light on innovative solutions to overcome communication barriers.

The presentation underscored the pivotal role of technology in enhancing communication access for individuals with hearing loss. She also emphasized that **“Everyone needs to have an elevator speech, we need to say what we need, or someone else will make the decision for us.”** Dr. Childress described various assistive technologies designed to bridge the gap and empower us to connect more effectively with our surroundings.

Remote Microphone Technology: One of the standout features discussed was the efficacy of remote microphone technology in overcoming the detrimental effects of distance and background noise. By providing a more robust speech signal, remote microphones facilitate improved listening experiences in various settings, ranging from one-on-one interactions to large group gatherings.

Assistive Listening Devices: Dr. Childress also explored a spectrum of assistive listening devices, including induction loops, infrared systems, and FM systems. These devices utilize cutting-edge technology to transmit audio signals directly to compatible devices, such as hearing aids or earbuds, thereby enhancing auditory experiences in diverse environments.

Bluetooth Connectivity: The integration of Bluetooth technology into hearing devices enables direct connectivity with smartphones and other compatible devices.

Auracast: Revolutionizing Accessibility: A notable highlight was the introduction of Auracast, a groundbreaking technology poised to revolutionize accessibility. Leveraging the latest Bluetooth protocols, Auracast promises to deliver multi-language support, public announcements, audio descriptions for the blind and low vision population, and an accessible option for museum and history tours. Auracast is not yet readily available, but should be an exciting roll out. Currently, there are only a handful of devices that are Auracast ready. Check with your audiologist, and keep this in mind when upgrading your hearing aids or cochlear implant processors.

Smart Technologies and Apps: Dr. Childress also shared a wealth of smart technologies and mobile applications designed to enhance accessibility. From voice recognition software to captioning apps and sound recognition tools, these innovative solutions empower us to customize our communication experiences according to our unique preferences and requirements.

A few highlights include:

Realtime Text (RTT). This app doesn't require a special number—it uses your mobile number, you can send and receive text in real time (meaning you can see the other person typing in each letter instead of waiting for a long message to appear on your screen. This can be used simultaneously with voice, so you can speak and use text for clarity.

Another useful tool is **Voiceitt** (requires a subscription). Voiceitt will train your phone to understand nonstandard speech, so if your speech is often poorly understood by the usual speech to text apps, this may be a good option for you.

Live Caption is something you may already be familiar with, but it is available in the accessibility settings on both iOS and Android and does a good job of transcribing speech coming through your phone. Examples would be phone calls and videos.

Google's **Live Transcribe** app is one of the most popular and accurate speech to text apps, and it was developed in partnership with Gallaudet University.

Empowerment through Advocacy: Beyond technology, Dr. Childress emphasized the importance of self-advocacy and empowerment. Encouraging us to assert our communication needs and seek appropriate accommodations, she underscored the significance of elevating your voice in ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in all facets of life.

Dr. Tina Childress's presentation was informative and practical. For TONS more information, check out her website for many lists of devices, strategies, apps, and new technology at tinachildressaud.com.