

# **Good Practice Guidance: Pre-School Family Support Groups for Children who are d/Deaf**

## **Definition of Terms:**

### **Pre-School Family Support Group (PSFSG)**

Within the context of this guidance, this term refers to groups which specifically cater for, and are attended by, pre-school age d/Deaf children and their families and are facilitated by a Specialist Support Service in the UK. These groups may have a range of individual titles, and the nature and context of these groups may vary from area to area.

### **Pre-school d/Deaf Children**

This term refers to children aged 0–5 years old, prior to formal school entry, who have a diagnosis of deafness. The term d/Deaf refers to children with all levels of deafness from mild to profound, including unilateral losses, and includes those who identify as deaf or Deaf.

### **Families of Pre-School Age d/Deaf Children**

This term refers to both the immediate and wider family of the young d/Deaf child and acknowledges the varied composition of individual families and the diversity of families' cultural backgrounds. It may also include others who are not related to the young d/Deaf child but are directly involved in their ongoing care and development e.g., family friends.

### **Specialist Support Services**

This term refers to Support Services for d/Deaf children and their families that are provided by Education as opposed to Health or Social Care Services within the UK. These services are typically staffed by Qualified Teachers of the Deaf (QToDs), Specialist Teaching Assistants (STAs) and/or Communication Support Workers (CSWs) and may also include other staff members such as Educational Audiologists and Deaf Role Models. These teams are typically led by a Head of Support Service, who may be a QToD or may have an alternative professional background. Within the UK, most of these teams are based within the Local Educational Authority, although other organisational arrangements exist (CRIDE 2022). Many services also meet the needs of children who have vision impairment, but this guidance relates specifically to support for children who are d/Deaf and their families.

## **Underlying Principles**

- This guidance seeks to identify the central elements of good practice in relation to the provision and content of PSFSGs. To support Specialist Support Services who provide PSFSGs to establish, evaluate and develop their provision and to enable families to be aware of what provision and good practice for themselves and their child/ren should look like.

- This guidance acknowledges differences in the local circumstances within which Pre-School Family Support Groups (PSFSG) operate and the need for Specialist Support Services to be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of the range of families in the locality.
- This guidance recognises the potential for good practice to be achieved via a range of potential models which best suit individual families and local circumstances.
- Equality of access to PSFSGs for all families of d/Deaf infants irrespective of linguistic, ethnic or cultural background or individual family circumstance is a central tenant of this guidance.

## **Good Practice Recommendations**

The recommendations in this document are based on the findings of the NDCS commissioned report entitled: *An Investigation into Pre-School Family Support Groups for children who are d/Deaf (2025)* with reference to current national and international guidance (Moeller et al, 2013; Moeller et al, 2024a,b,c; Moodie et al, 2024; NDCS, 2016; Sass-Lehrer et al, 2024; Swarkowski et al, 2024a,b,c;) and UK nation-specific legislation (Department for Education/Department for Health, 2015; Department for Education for Northern Ireland 2020,2005,1996; Scottish Government (2017, 2006 onwards; Welsh Assembly Government, 2013). The recommendations were jointly developed with input from families and professionals involved in the research.

### **Ethical Considerations for Specialist Support Services who provide PSFSGs**

- Specialist Support Services should ensure equality of provision for families who choose to attend/choose not to attend/or are unable to attend the PSFSG.
- Specialist Support Services should aim to ensure that the composition of the group fully reflects the demographic profile of the local caseload of families of d/Deaf children.

### **Access to information for Families about the PSFSG**

- Specialist Support Services should take active steps to ensure that families of pre-school age d/Deaf children are aware of the PSFSG and the potential benefits of attendance
- Families who are not currently attending the PSFSG should continue to be informed about the PSFSG at different points in the development of their d/Deaf child, in recognition of the potential for changes to family needs/preferences over time.
- Families should have access to advance information about the planned programme of PSFSG meetings, to enable them to prioritise sessions which are most relevant to their needs, if they wish to do so, or if they are unable to attend all sessions on offer.
- Providers should ensure that other agencies who are involved with the family, including Audiology departments, are aware of the PSFSG and are able to provide information to families.

## **Accessibility**

### **Inclusion criteria**

- Families should be invited to attend the PSFSG irrespective of the degree of their child's deafness, permanence or transitory nature of the child's deafness, use of personal hearing equipment or otherwise.
- Invitation to attend the PSFSG should include the immediate and wider family, including the d/Deaf child's sibling/s and others involved in supporting the d/Deaf child and family e.g. family friends, childminders etc.

### **Location of the PSFSG**

The PSFSG should be:

- In a central location which is accessible to the maximum number of families in the area or
- Provided in several locations (where numbers of attendees make this viable) or
- Provided in different venues on a rotational basis within the locality, to facilitate ease of access for families.
- In a location which has good local public transport links and car parking facilities.
- In a venue which is suitable for pre-school children and families in terms of resources suitable for the age/stage of the children, with opportunity for storage of resources between sessions if possible.
- In a venue which is accessible to those with physical disabilities
- In a venue which is baby/infant friendly i.e. has facilities for heating food/milk, nappy changing, storing pushchairs etc.
- In a venue which has good acoustics to facilitate optimal listening conditions.

### **On-line Provision**

- In addition to providing opportunities for families, professionals and d/Deaf infants to meet face-to-face, Specialist Support Services should consider the role of an on-line component to their provision to facilitate virtual access to information and support for family members.

### **Interpretation for family members**

- Provision of BSL Interpretation for family members whose 1<sup>st</sup> language is BSL.
- Provision of interpretation for family members in their home language.

## **Transport**

- Funding of transport for families facing financial and logistical barriers to attending.
- Exploration of no cost options to support families to attend e.g. car sharing, use of different venues within the locality to enable families to access a venue which is closer to them.

## **Funding**

- It is recognised that facilitating full equality of access for families who face barriers to attendance may have financial implications for those Specialist Support Services providing PSFSGs.
- Specialist Support Services should explore and seek to access the full range of funding options available to support families e.g. no cost/low cost solutions (as suggested above), use of current resources/funds available to the Service, accessing charitable funding (where this is available), supporting families to access charitable funding available to families of d/Deaf children and making those commissioning services for d/Deaf children and their families aware of the need for adequate funding to ensure that good practice guidance is met and equality of access is achieved.

## **Content of Sessions**

- Opportunity for families to meet with each other and share advice and experiences.
- Opportunity for families to meet with professionals.
- Provision of play activities appropriate for pre-school aged children who are d/Deaf.
- Provision of songs/musical activities to develop listening and communication skills.
- Provision of input from visiting speakers on topics related to early childhood and/or deafness.
- Consistent and accurate modelling of spoken language within the session.
- Consistent and accurate modelling of BSL within the session, facilitated by a native or fluent user of BSL.
- Provision of audiological support and maintenance of equipment.
- Bespoke content and resources for babies in attendance.
- Opportunity for parents to meet with parents of older d/Deaf children/young adults who are at different educational stages and with older d/Deaf children/young adults themselves.

## **Staffing**

- Staffed by professionals, including Qualified Teachers of the Deaf, Specialist Teaching Assistants, Communication Support Workers, with experience and training in working with young d/Deaf children and families.
- Facilitation of opportunities for those staff who have less experience and skills in working with pre-school aged d/Deaf and their families to attend the PSFSG to undertake training and work-shadowing.
- Regular input to the PSFSG from Speech and Language Therapy and Clinical Audiology.
- d/Deaf adults should be involved in the planning and delivery of the sessions.
- It is beneficial for the same staff to regularly attend the session to enable families to build relationships with, and trust in the professionals in attendance and for the staff to develop understanding and knowledge of the child and family.

### **Feedback**

- Families should be invited to give regular feedback either informally or via more formal methods such as questionnaires.
- Suggestions made by families should be responded to and incorporated into planning and delivery of sessions.

### **Links to other provision**

- The PSFSG should be a forum to provide information about other resources available to in the locality, such as BSL classes for families or other groups e.g. local NDCS groups.

### **Continued Provision for families no longer attending the PSFSG**

- Services should consider how to provide continued opportunity for families and d/Deaf children to meet once they are no longer able to attend the PSFSG e.g. once the d/Deaf child starts nursery, on school entry, family work commitments etc.
- Services should consider how to provide opportunity for families unable to attend sessions within the working hours to meet with other families and professionals

### **Special Interest Groups**

- Specialist Support Services should consider how to meet with other Specialist Support Services to establish Special Interest Groups to share ideas and good practice regarding PSFSGs.

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