

# Deaf-friendly early education and childcare

For practitioners working with  
children in the early years



Funded by



Department  
for Education



**Our vision is a world without barriers for every deaf child.**

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## **A note about terms**

We use the term 'deaf' to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss such as glue ear. It also includes children who have been identified as having a hearing impairment in the School Census.

We use the term 'parent' to refer to all parents and carers of children.



# 1 Introduction

**Deafness isn't a learning disability, and deaf children have the potential to achieve the same outcomes as any other child, with the right support.**

Every child deserves the best possible start in life. Children develop quickly in the early years, and their early relationships, interactions and experiences form the building blocks for healthy brains and lay the foundations for future development.

You play an important role in making this happen by:

- **having high aspirations** by recognising the needs of the deaf child and their family and removing the barriers that stop them from achieving their goals
- **adapting your environment** and activities so all deaf children can take part every day
- **supporting the deaf child to achieve early learning goals** and prepare for school, particularly in language development
- **understanding the different hearing technologies**, how they work and how to get the best from them
- **knowing where to go for specialist advice and support**
- **promoting a child's deaf identity** and helping them to form positive relationships.

## Who is this resource for?

This resource is for anyone working with deaf children in an early years setting, including:

- nurseries – local authority, private or voluntary
- pre-school
- childminder
- nanny
- after-school club
- crèche
- playgroup.

## How to use this resource

Use this resource alongside support and advice from local specialist educational support services for deaf children.

You can download this resource from [ndcs.org.uk/deaf-friendly-early-years](https://ndcs.org.uk/deaf-friendly-early-years).

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for funding from the Department for Education. This guide is intended to be useful to anyone, regardless of where they work in the UK.



## 2

# Understanding childhood deafness

Deaf babies and children have the same potential to develop and learn as any other child, given the right support, right from the start.

## Deafness and development

The brain builds the foundations of language and learning in the first few years of life. Deafness can have a significant impact on the early development of:

- communication and language
- listening, attention, understanding and speaking
- personal, social and emotional development and wellbeing
- understanding the world
- early literacy and learning of early concepts.



Recognising and addressing the impact of deafness as early as possible can have a major impact on children's outcomes. Our resource 'Success from the start: A developmental resource for families of deaf children aged 0-3' has lots of information, activities and checklists on deafness and development: [ndcs.org.uk/successfromthestart](https://ndcs.org.uk/successfromthestart).

## Communication and language development

Babies are hearing and seeing language and communication from their earliest months, so any level of childhood deafness has a major impact on learning spoken language. This includes:

- being able to make sense of what people say
- understanding what's happening around them
- expressing and managing their emotions
- being able to see things from a different viewpoint
- learning to think things through and problem solve.

Early identification of deafness, combined with early communication support from knowledgeable professionals and the child's family, can make a significant and positive impact on language development. Creating a rich language environment, regardless of whether the language is spoken, signed or a combination of spoken language and sign, is the foundation for later successful language outcomes. Find out more about how deaf children communicate in Appendix C.



We have many online resources about developing language and communication in young children, including a video series – [ndcs.org.uk/developinglanguagecommunication](https://ndcs.org.uk/developinglanguagecommunication).

## Describing deafness

Each child's deafness is individual to them and will have an individual impact on their learning and development. Families will describe deafness in different ways. They may use the term deaf, hearing loss, hearing impairment or hard of hearing. They may describe their child's deafness in terms of how deaf they are (level), or by the cause or type.

### Levels of deafness are described as:

- **Mild** — a child with mild deafness may hear some speech sounds, but soft sounds are hard to hear.
- **Moderate** — a child with moderate deafness may hear a little speech, or work out what someone is saying, when a person is talking at a normal level.
- **Severe** — a child with severe deafness will not hear the speech of a person talking at a normal level and only some loud sounds.
- **Profound** — a child with profound deafness will not hear any speech and only very loud sounds.

The child's Teacher of the Deaf can explain their hearing loss by showing you an audiogram (for information about the Teacher of the Deaf role, go to page 17). An audiogram will show you what a child can and cannot hear. (See what an audiogram looks like in Appendix A).

### Types of deafness can be described as:

- unilateral or one sided (in one ear), or bilateral (in both ears)
- sensorineural (inner ear deafness), conductive (middle or outer ear deafness), or 'mixed'
- permanent or temporary.

You can find out more about the levels and types of deafness in Appendix A.

### **Don't overlook a mild hearing loss!**

The impact of a mild hearing loss is often overlooked, especially if the child doesn't wear hearing technology. But because babies and young children have not yet developed the ability to filter out background noise or fill in the gaps of missed information, a mild hearing loss can have a significant impact. To find out more about how to support children with a mild hearing loss, download our resource 'Mild hearing loss' at [ndcs.org.uk/mildhearingloss](https://ndcs.org.uk/mildhearingloss).

### **How you can help**

The child's audiologist will assess and record how much and what the child can hear, but they may not always respond to testing in the clinic. It can also be difficult to work out what very young children can hear in their everyday world or to know if they have had a change in their hearing. Keeping a record of what sounds the child responds to in your care and what they do with that information can be helpful.

### **Causes of deafness**

Half of deaf children are born deaf, and half will become deaf during the first few years of life. There are many reasons why this happens including:

- infection
- illness
- genetics
- medical intervention at birth.

 Cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection in an unborn baby is called congenital CMV (congenital means present from birth).

Congenital CMV (cCMV) causes about 10% to 20% of permanent deafness in children in the UK and is the leading cause of non-hereditary deafness. Half of all children with deafness caused by cCMV have a degree of deafness at birth, and this may be picked up following newborn hearing screening. The other half go on to develop deafness after birth. Usually, deafness caused by cCMV develops during the first three years of life, but some children may develop deafness later in childhood.

To find out more about the causes of deafness, go to [ndcs.org.uk/causes](https://ndcs.org.uk/causes).

## How do I know if a child in my care is deaf?

Early identification of deafness, alongside support from deaf specialists and early years practitioners, can make a significant difference to a deaf child's language, emotional health and wellbeing, and learning outcomes.

It's important to watch for possible signs of deafness and to monitor deaf children's hearing levels for signs of deterioration.

A child may be deaf if they show any of the following:

- **Changes in behaviour.** Babies and young children may seem less alert or responsive when you are talking and playing with them. They may more easily tire or show signs of frustration.
- **Difficulties in hearing on one side or knowing where the sound is coming from.** Children may look around to see who is calling them or appear to be ignoring you.
- **Delayed spoken language development or unclear speech.** Babies and children may use fewer speech sounds, mispronounce words or leave out word endings and little words like 'the' and 'a'.
- **Poor listening and attention skills.** Children may find it difficult to listen to stories or pay attention when you are talking to them.
- **Challenges listening to spoken information,** especially when it's noisy or several people are talking. Children may find it difficult to join in with group activities or follow simple instructions.
- **Difficulties following games or being fully involved in play** with other children. Children might talk too loudly or too softly or spend time watching others play.
- **Not knowing when someone is approaching them.** Children may startle when they see you even if you have called their name.
- **Challenges with early phonological skills** like following rhythms, playing listening games or being able to tell the difference between similar sounds if they can't see them.
- **Careful watching of faces and lips** or constantly saying "What?"
- **Discomfort or complaining about not being able to hear.** Some children may also have ear pain or a smelly discharge.

Children with a temporary hearing loss (such as **glue ear**) may display these behaviours intermittently. If you are concerned that a child in your care may have a hearing loss, talk to the family and encourage them to make an appointment with their GP.

**!** **Glue ear (otitis media with effusion)**

Glue ear – a temporary hearing loss – is one of the most common causes of hearing problems for young children. Around 1 in 5 pre-school children have glue ear at any one time and may miss up to half of what is being said.<sup>1</sup>

Glue ear is a build-up of thick, sticky fluid in the middle ear space. This fluid stops the eardrum from vibrating properly, causing a hearing loss. Glue ear is particularly common in winter or after a cold and is often linked to ear infections.

Glue ear often clears up without treatment, but young children are more at risk of persistent problems because their immune system and ear anatomy are not fully developed.

Chronic glue ear can significantly impact young children’s learning and development, so any adaptations or simple strategies you put in place will make a big difference.

Our website has lots of information on glue ear and what you can do to help – [ndcs.org.uk/glueear](https://ndcs.org.uk/glueear).

You can also tell parents about the **Hear Glue Ear app** which is a valuable tool to help families manage glue ear at home – [cambridgedigitalhealth.co.uk/hear-glue-ear-app](https://cambridgedigitalhealth.co.uk/hear-glue-ear-app).

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1. Clinical Guideline, National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence. 'Surgical Management of Otitis Media with Effusion in Children'. 2008.

## Deafness and additional needs

Many children who have learning difficulties or neurological differences, such as Down's syndrome or autism, are also deaf. It's important to take steps to understand and address the impact of the deafness so the child has the best chance at learning, communicating, and socialising.

## Hearing technology

Deaf children who communicate and learn spoken language or need access to sound will be using a range of technology.

### Personal hearing devices

- hearing aids
- cochlear implants
- bone conduction hearing system.

Hearing devices amplify the sounds a deaf child finds most difficult to hear but cannot replace normal hearing. They work best when the baby or child is close to the person speaking and when there's not a lot of competing noise.

Find out how to help children using hearing devices in your setting in Chapter 5.

### Assistive listening devices

- radio aids
- streamers

Radio aids and streamers in the early years can make a big difference to communication and language and improve adult and child interaction. We have lots of information on radio aids in the early years in our resource, 'How Radio Aids Can Help' – go to [ndcs.org.uk/radioaids](https://ndcs.org.uk/radioaids).

**You will:**

- know how my deafness can impact my development
- understand how important a rich language environment is to me
- recognise if I acquire deafness or my deafness changes
- know that there are different levels and types of deafness and hearing technology.





# 3

## Developing positive relationships

“The meaningful and effective involvement of a deaf child’s parents and family is the single most important predictor of outcomes.”<sup>2</sup>

### Parents

90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, who may have little or no knowledge of deafness. A deaf child’s family may worry that their child will never be able to achieve as other children do. They may also find communicating with their child more challenging. Early years practitioners play a key role in providing crucial support to the whole family through:

- **Positive relationships** in which parents feel confident that their child's deafness is understood, and they can participate in regular, structured conversations about their child’s progress and planning for next steps, however small.
- **Understanding what families need.** Deaf family members may need access to adaptations including a British Sign Language interpreter so they can be part of meetings. Parents may need information about deafness and learning.
- **Knowing who is who.** Parents know who they can talk to, for example, if they have problems with their child’s hearing technology.
- **Finding out what parents want for their deaf child** and working together to achieve their goals.
- **Actively seeking feedback** from the deaf child and their family about what works.

How, what and when you communicate and share with home can be really important for the families of deaf children who may have many competing priorities. You may want to keep in regular contact with the deaf child’s family about such subjects as:

- **hearing technology** – how and when it is being used and what you are observing
- **appointments** – including visits and advice from outside professionals or visits to audiology
- **language and communication** – whether what you are observing is the same as the family and what the next steps are

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2. Yoshinaga-Itano, C. Successful outcomes for deaf and hard-of-hearing children. ‘Seminars in Hearing’. 2000. 21. 309–326.

- **emotional and social wellbeing** – parents of deaf children are often more worried about how their child is coping in everyday situations and interactions.

## Resources to share with families

Here are some resources which you could share with the families of the deaf children in your care:

- **Deaf people talking about their aspirations and careers.** Families sometimes think that their child will not be able to do the things that other people do. We have lots of inspiring videos which you can share with families – search ‘Deaf Works Everywhere’ in YouTube.
- **Language and communication.** Parents may worry about how best to communicate with their child. We have lots of information on how deaf children communicate and develop language at [ndcs.org.uk/communication](https://ndcs.org.uk/communication), or watch our video series, in collaboration with the University of Sheffield at [ndcs.org.uk/developing-language-communication](https://ndcs.org.uk/developing-language-communication).
- **The home learning environment** is the biggest predictor of a child’s future success<sup>3</sup> and lays the foundations for future development. We have lots of information, ideas and games on learning at home on our website at [ndcs.org.uk/homelearning](https://ndcs.org.uk/homelearning).
- **Playing with children** is the best way for them to learn and is a key tool for supporting healthy development. Find out more about play by going to [ndcs.org.uk/playtime](https://ndcs.org.uk/playtime).
- **Hearing devices and technology.** Many deaf children will be using technology to help them access language and learning. We have lots of resources which can help families understand more about their child’s hearing technology and their deafness at [ndcs.org.uk/childhooddeafness](https://ndcs.org.uk/childhooddeafness).
- **Families will have lots of questions.** Our ‘How do I’ section answers lots of commonly asked questions on how to support a child to navigate everyday events – [ndcs.org.uk/howdoi](https://ndcs.org.uk/howdoi).
- **A positive deaf identity** helps children realise there are people out there just like them. Find out about our books which all have deaf characters at [ndcs.org.uk/childrens-books](https://ndcs.org.uk/childrens-books).

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3. Improving the home learning environment: A behaviour change approach. [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/919363/Improving\\_the\\_home\\_learning\\_environment.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919363/Improving_the_home_learning_environment.pdf). November 2018.

## Professionals who support deaf children

### Teacher of the Deaf (ToD)

A qualified Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) is a teacher who has gained a further mandatory qualification in working with deaf children. The ToD may have been working with a child and their family from as early as six weeks. A ToD can help you:

- with strategies to support the child to learn and participate fully in your setting
- to use and maintain hearing technologies
- with specialist assessments to identify the child's developmental needs
- with improvements to the listening environment and access to activities
- to be deaf aware
- coordinate meetings with other agencies involved with the child
- support transition to new settings and to primary school
- with progress checks and reports to families.



Watch Barbara explaining the role of the Teacher of the Deaf – [bit.ly/pro-ToD](https://bit.ly/pro-ToD).



### Audiologist

A deaf child will have regular appointments with an audiologist who will have assessed their level and type of hearing loss and selected the most appropriate hearing technology.

Although it is unlikely that the audiologist will contact you, your everyday observations of how a deaf child is managing will be an important source of information for the audiologist.

The Teacher of the Deaf can provide you with information about the child's deafness and their hearing technology.



Watch Ruth explaining the role of the audiologist – [bit.ly/pro-audiologist](https://bit.ly/pro-audiologist).



## Speech and language therapist

Deaf children may receive input from a speech and language therapist. The therapist will assess and monitor a child's understanding and use of communication, language, listening skills, and speech or sign production skills.

The speech and language therapist may work directly with the child, or they may suggest programmes for you and the family to put in place and will visit to check the child's progress.



Watch Fiona explaining the role of the speech and language therapist – [bit.ly/pro-SLT](https://bit.ly/pro-SLT).



## Health visitor

Health visitors offer support and provide informed advice to parents in the early years. They will visit families at home at least five times from late pregnancy through to a developmental assessment at two years (England) or up to starting school (Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales).

The health visitor may:

- invite you to join groups, clinics and networks run by the health visiting team or colleagues who work with them to share information about deafness
- be part of progress checks
- work with families to provide them with information and support on how best to support the development of their child.

## Support workers

Deaf children who use other communication alongside or instead of spoken language may need specialist support to ensure they are provided with a rich language environment and can be fully included. This may involve, for example, having a communication support worker. A Teacher of the Deaf can provide advice on how best to do this.

Here are some ideas of how support workers can help deaf children:

- Model, recast and extend language by communicating about what the deaf child is doing.
- Prepare the child for group or class activity, for example, talk about what is going to happen, share a book and talk about the content, or pre-learn a song or action rhyme so the child can fully participate.
- Carry out one-to-one intervention to support early concepts, listening and language development.
- Support the child to socialise with others and create play opportunities.
- Keep the child safe, for example, if they miss key instructions.



## Early years stories

Our families have shared with us the different barriers they and their children have experienced and how they have overcome them together with the professionals who support them. Read these stories at [ndcs.org.uk/early-years-stories](https://ndcs.org.uk/early-years-stories).

## Making friends

Many deaf children develop good speech and language skills but keeping up with their classmates in social situations can be challenging when it's difficult to hear and there is a language delay. They may also take longer to understand or follow complex and changing social rules. It can also be difficult to communicate in noisy classrooms or when they can't see or hear the person who is talking. Here are some things you can do to help.

- **Develop social communication skills.** As children develop communication and language so they appear to be more social and in turn people are more social towards them. Give the child lots of opportunities to observe and be involved in a range of social situations.
- **Be deaf aware** and help children to understand how best to communicate with their deaf classmate.
- **Model good social interaction skills** such as turn taking or active listening and attention through eye contact, nodding or responding to others.
- **Praise and support attempts to interact**, such as joining in with games, starting conversations or showing an interest in what someone is doing.
- **Repeat and check understanding** of what other children say in group or noisy situations.

### You will:

- know where to go for information and advice to support my family
- know about the people who can support me and how they can help me to learn and develop
- support me to develop friendships and communicate with everyone.





# 4

## The unique child

### Welcoming a deaf child to your care

Transitions are an important part of life and offer opportunities for new experiences and personal growth, but they may also bring feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for children and their families. This is especially true for the parents of deaf children who may be accustomed to making the world accessible for their child. Every deaf child is different. Here are some ideas to help you plan for a successful start:

- **Allow plenty of time** to meet with other professionals, organise visits and put new routines into place.
- **Get to know the child's family** so that you can build a relationship, share knowledge and develop a plan for the transition from home into your care.
- **Meet with the Teacher of the Deaf** to understand and plan for the deaf child's individual needs within your care and their development priorities.
- **Collect information** from the family, Teacher of the Deaf, services in health, education and social care and the voluntary sector.
- **Provide accessible information** for the family and the child about your setting through videos, photos, messages and visits.
- **Discuss your settling in procedures** and adapt if necessary to meet the needs of the child and their family.
- **Attend training or arrange training** for yourself and others – this could include training on deaf awareness, the child's hearing technology or sign language.

It is helpful to agree a transition/transfer plan well in advance of the baby or child starting.

**!** Be prepared to make adaptations for deaf family members if needed. For example, at meetings they may need a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, captions for virtual calls, and a good acoustic environment. You should also use their preferred means of communication (for example, they may prefer email to phone calls).

You should regularly invite parents to discuss their child's progress with you and plan next steps. Actively seek feedback from both the deaf child and their family about what is working and what could be improved.



Parent stories – My deaf child and going to nursery -  
[bit.ly/DA\\_nursery](https://bit.ly/DA_nursery)



## The transition plan

A transition plan can be changed and added to. Many activities such as joint meetings between settings, childminders and school staff can be ongoing throughout the year.

Deaf children in Scotland with identified additional learning needs starting at nursery will need to follow the transitions guidance as laid out in Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017.<sup>4</sup>

Here are some suggestions of information that could be included in a transition plan. The Teacher of the Deaf can help you record this information.

<b>Child’s information</b>	Find out as much as you can about the child, such as important people in their lives, what they enjoy doing and who they are.
<b>Family information</b>	Find out about the deaf child’s family, their hopes and aspirations and their support needs.
<b>Deafness</b>	
<b>Type of deafness: permanent or temporary or both</b>	<p>Permanent hearing losses sometimes cause some sounds to be distorted. This can affect spoken language development and early literacy. Find out as much as you can about the child’s deafness.</p> <p>If deafness is temporary, then make sure you know what the signs of the deafness are and what you will do to support the child.</p> <p>Many children will have a permanent deafness which is made worse by frequent episodes of glue ear. You may need to give the child extra support at these times.</p>

4. For information about the ‘Additional support for learning: statutory guidance 2017’, go to [gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland](http://gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland).

<p><b>Level of deafness: mild, moderate, severe or profound</b></p>	<p>If hearing technology isn't being used, or is broken, it will be important to know how much the deaf child can hear so you can plan for this, for example, to keep them safe or make sure they can follow instructions and routines.</p> <p>Some children have no hearing in certain frequencies which means they will have no access to some speech sounds. Find out which these are and how to help.</p>
<p><b>Deafness in both ears (bilateral) or one side only (unilateral)? If unilateral, which side?</b></p>	<p>How to get the best access to sound by prioritising the side through which they can hear best.</p>
<p><b>Hearing technology</b></p>	
<p><b>Type of hearing device:</b></p>	<p>Find out as much as possible about the deaf child's hearing technology, for example, what it's called, how it works, when and how the child uses it.</p> <p>Make plans for how it will be looked after and who will do what and how often, for example, change batteries and carry out visual and listening checks.</p> <p>Be deaf-friendly. Hearing devices work best when you are close and there is not a lot of competing noise.</p>
<p><b>Hearing checks and appointments</b></p>	<p>Find out about hearing checks and who is responsible for the child's device if it's not working properly, or something is broken.</p>
<p><b>Other technology: radio aids, streamers, soundfield system</b></p>	<p>Does the child use other hearing technology, and if so, how does it work and who supplies it?</p>

<b>Communication and language</b>	
<b>How does the child communicate?</b>	<p>Find out as much as you can about the child's communication. How much language is spoken or signed? When do they use it, and how do they use it?</p> <p>Are you able to communicate effectively with the child, and if not, what do you need to do for this to happen?</p>
<b>What is their stage of communication and language development?</b>	<p>It will be important to monitor the child's communication and language development across all areas of development including their social use and understanding.</p> <p>Find out what assessments and interventions will best meet the child's communication and language needs. Deaf children may need extra support with their communication and language to help them learn.</p>
<b>Development</b>	
<b>Information about the child's development</b>	<p>What are the child's strengths and weaknesses across all areas of development, and how can these be supported and utilised?</p> <p>What are the child's interests, and how can these be used to engage and promote learning?</p> <p>What independence skills need to be promoted about deafness, hearing technology and communication?</p>

<b>Emotional health and wellbeing</b>	
<b>What is the family's attitude to and knowledge of deafness?</b>	Does the family need support with their child's deafness and do they have access to resources, information and advice?
<b>What does the child know and feel about their deafness?</b>	How will the child's deaf identity be supported through discussion, stories and contact with other deaf children and deaf adults and role models?
<b>Can the child communicate about how they and others feel?</b>	Deaf children may have challenges with identifying and communicating about their or others' emotions. It will be important to think about how to do this through discussion, teaching and stories.
<b>What do others need to know about deafness and how to support a deaf child?</b>	Deaf children may feel isolated, so making sure their peers are deaf-friendly and can include them fully will help.  What other knowledge and training is needed to meet the needs of the child?
<b>Working with others</b>	Find out about other professionals who are involved with the child, when and how they see the child, what their roles are and how best to communicate with them.
<b>Other</b>	Find out any other information which is important to the child, their family and how you are going to support the child and adapt your environment.

You can use the following transition plan template to help you record this information. You can also download this template from [ndcs.org.uk/deaf-friendly-early-years](https://ndcs.org.uk/deaf-friendly-early-years).



# My bright start transition plan

Everyone works together with me for my good. If all the grown-ups in my life see possibilities instead of problems, I can be ready for my next step in my journey. Nothing for me without me!



Date: .....

## About me

Name	
Address	
Date of birth	
Home language	

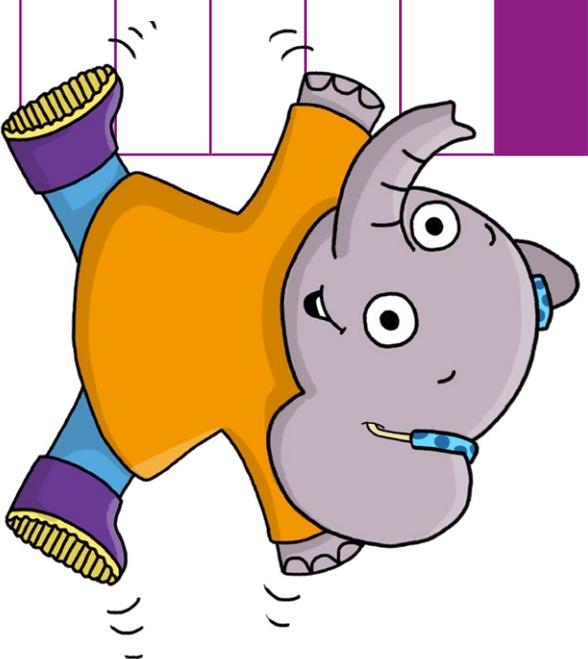
## About my parent/carers

Name(s)		
Relationship to child		
Phone number		
Email address		



## About my current setting

Setting name	
Contact person and their position	
Setting address	
Phone number	
Email address	



## Professionals who support me

(for example, Teacher of the Deaf, audiologist, health visitor)

Role			
Name			
Address (if relevant)			
Phone number			
Email address			

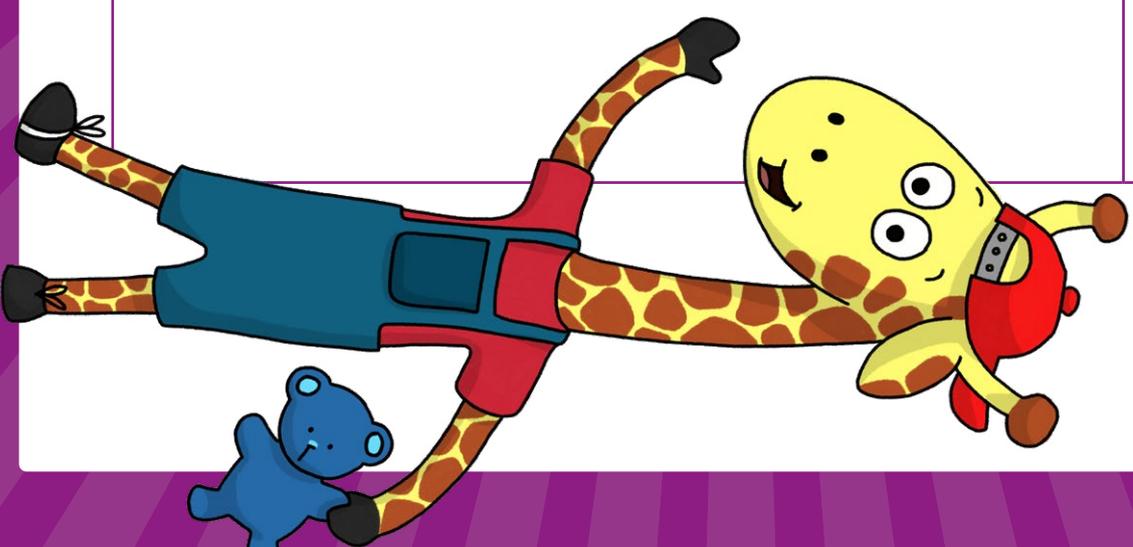


# My bright start – by me

In here, you can add drawings, photos, etc

Things that make me happy

Things I don't like



# My bright start – by my parents/carers



**Confidence and resilience**  
What can they do well?

**Being independent**  
Where do they still need help?

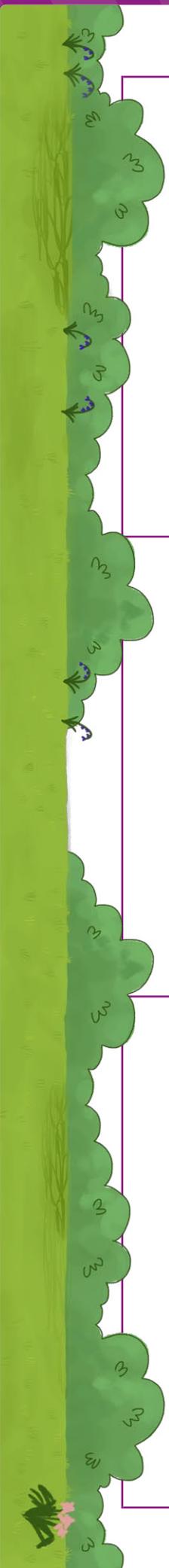
**Being happy**  
What makes them happy? What do they like?



**Expressing myself**  
How do they share their big feelings?

**Being included**  
How do you want them to be supported?

**High aspirations**  
What's important to them now and in the future?



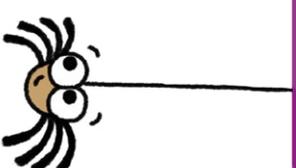
# My bright start – what does my new setting or school need to know?

To be completed by my current setting working together with my parents and Teacher of the Deaf



<b>My deafness</b> For example, type and level of deafness, hearing technology used, etc	<b>What needs to be done for me to improve my access to sound?</b>	<b>What needs to be done for me to ensure best use of my hearing technologies?</b>
<b>What needs to be done to keep me safe?</b> Consider fire alarms, road safety, etc	<b>What is my preferred way of communicating?</b>	<b>What can you do to help me access all learning opportunities?</b> Consider seating position to allow for lip-reading, using radio aids, ensuring good acoustics

# My bright start – what does my new setting or school need to know? (continued)



What can you do to help me with my social development and wellbeing?	What can you do to help me with my communication and language?	What can you do to help me with my play and understanding?
What can you do to help my parents/carers with my move to a new school/setting?	Other learning areas	What else do you need to share about me?

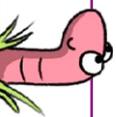


# My bright start – what next?

To be completed by my current setting working together with my parents, Teacher of the Deaf, and new setting or school



<b>What next for me and my family?</b>	<b>What next for my current setting?</b>	<b>What next for my new school/setting?</b>
<b>What next for professionals who support me?</b>	<b>Do we need to involve anyone else in my transition?</b>	<b>What will the home/setting liaison arrangements look like?</b> (For example, an online communication book or face-to-face meetings)



# Action Plan

Action	Who will take this forward?	Timescale



**You will:**

- prepare for my arrival by meeting with my family and the people who support me
- make a plan which sets out my individual strengths and needs and how you are going to help me develop and learn.



## 5 Creating enabling environments

Simple adaptations to your environment can make a big difference to a deaf child's development and improve their access to language and learning.

When you meet with the Teacher of the Deaf, ask them for advice on how you can adapt your setting to provide the best possible deaf-friendly environment.

### Early communication and interaction

Critical periods for language development start from the last three months of pregnancy and continue over the first five years of life. The foundation of early language is quality communication and interaction from adults who are familiar to the child. This includes the following:

- **Joint attention and shared attention** – communicating about and showing interest in the child's immediate environment and what they are interested in.
- **Conversational turn taking** – responding to the child's gestures and noises through mirroring and copying and then waiting for them to respond to you.
- **Visual, tactile and auditory cues** – using a range of touch, natural gesture, sign, facial expression and vocal cues to engage and respond to the child.
- **Intersubjectivity and reciprocity** – responding in a sensitive and appropriate manner to the child's communication from the earliest possible time.<sup>5</sup>



We have many online resources about developing language and communication in young children, including a video series, at [ndcs.org.uk/developinglanguagecommunication](https://ndcs.org.uk/developinglanguagecommunication).

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5. Collinson, S. 'Early years language and development in deaf children – a best evidence scoping review.' 2017.

## Early language

To develop a full first language, all children need access to a rich language environment. For most deaf children, this will be the language used in the home by their families. Whichever language a child uses, whether it be spoken or signed, good quality language input includes the following:

- **Asking simple questions** – who, what, why and when.
- **Giving simple instructions** with gesture to support understanding – “Go and get your shoes”, with pointing, simple signs and eye gaze.
- **Describing and extending what the child is interested in** – “What a beautiful blue bag, I wonder what’s inside?”
- **Asking open-ended questions** – “Who do you think took the last biscuit?”
- **Asking questions about thinking** – “I wonder who the shoe might belong to? I think it might be the little sister’s, what do you think?”
- **Using a wide range of vocabulary in context** and pinning new vocabulary onto something the child already knows or can see.

## Creating a good quality language environment

A child’s language and communication development will be impacted by the quality and quantity of the language input they receive.<sup>67</sup> Deaf babies and children may have fewer opportunities to access quality language input because of the following:

- Young children are more likely to acquire a mild or temporary hearing loss, and this might not be spotted.
- Hearing technologies cannot replace normal hearing. They work best when the speaker is close and there is no competing noise.
- Deaf children may not be able to filter out unwanted noise to hear speech or work out what people are saying.
- They may not be able to overhear conversations, which is how we learn about lots of things.
- They may need more visual information, such as gestures, facial expressions and signs, to understand language.
- Children using sign language may not have enough opportunities to see high quality signing.

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6. Holzinger, D., Fellingner, J., and Beitel, C. Early onset of family centred intervention predicts language outcomes in children with hearing loss. ‘International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology.’ 2011. 75(2), 256–260.

7. Yoshinaga-Itano, C. From Screening to Early Identification and Intervention: Discovering predictors to successful outcomes for children with significant hearing loss. ‘Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education.’ 2003. 8(1). 11–30.

## Creating a good communication environment

A good communication environment recognises that there are many ways of understanding and expressing ourselves. It encourages, supports and promotes different ways of communicating. You can include deaf children through:

- **speech** that is simple, clear and at the right level for the child's understanding
- **body language** that supports and matches the spoken word
- **gestures and facial expressions** that support and match the spoken word
- **signing** that is done at the same time as speaking and in the same word order
- **sign language** which has a different word order and grammar to spoken language
- **pictures, photos, graphics and symbols** that support both the spoken and written word
- **objects** that can be used to stand for people, locations or activities.
- **modelling** good communication techniques and talking about what you are doing and why.

### Top 10 communication tips

1. Get my attention before you talk to me. Touch my arm or wave to me.
2. Make sure my hearing technology is working correctly.
3. Get down to my eye level so I can see your face and tune into what you're saying.
4. Make sure there's enough light on your face so I can see you clearly. Sometimes if it's very sunny, the light on your face makes it hard for me to see.
5. Make sure I'm not too far away from you, especially if you're reading a story or giving instructions.
6. Speak normally to me but clearly. Don't exaggerate your words as it changes the way your mouth moves.
7. Don't cover your mouth when you talk – I like to see your whole face and lips when you're speaking.
8. Use visuals, props and toys to add more meaning to what you're saying and give me time to move my attention between both.
9. After speaking, wait for me to respond. Sometimes it takes me a while to process what you have said.
10. Repeat what you or others say if you think I haven't heard it.



## Creating a good listening and acoustic environment

To learn through spoken language, deaf children need to:

- hear – have access to sound through a good acoustic or sound environment
- listen – know how to engage and make sense of the sound they can hear.

Children may not learn to listen if they do not have good access to sound. They can't access sound if they are in a poor acoustic environment.

### Creating a good acoustic environment

**No technology can replace normal hearing**, so how much a child can hear will be affected by where they are and the noises they are surrounded by – their acoustic environment.

Have a look at your acoustic environment and how it changes over the day both inside and out. This will depend on:

- what provision you offer – childminder; private, voluntary or independent (PVI) nurseries; early years class
- the type of building you are in – older buildings often have fewer acoustic treatments and higher ceilings
- where you are – quiet rural setting or on a busy road.



Watch our video for ideas on how to reduce background noise at [ndcs.org.uk/reducing-background-noise](https://ndcs.org.uk/reducing-background-noise).

Here are some acoustic situations which are particularly challenging for deaf children along with ideas on how you can minimise the impact.

### Reverberation and echo

Deaf children will experience challenges to accessing speech and sound if there is **a lot of reverberation and echo** in a room (poor acoustics). Rooms with hard surfaces (large uncovered/painted walls, glass windows and tiled or wooden floors) and high ceilings allow sounds to 'bounce around'. This distorts what is heard through a child's hearing technology.

Here are some ideas to reduce reverberation and echo:

- Fit curtains, carpets or blinds.
- Put rubber tips or 'hush ups' on the bottoms of chairs and table legs.
- Use display drapes on walls and on tables.
- Place rugs and table cloths underneath noisy activities such as construction toys.

## Background noise

The adult brain has learnt how to fill in the gaps of missed information – speech sounds or parts of words – that weren't heard. Deaf babies and children are not able to do this. This means they can miss out on a lot of new information or misunderstand or mishear.

Here are some ideas to reduce noise:

- Close doors to noisy areas. For example, close the door to the hallway, or in a home setting, close the kitchen door if the washing machine is on.
- Close windows to reduce the noise of traffic or children playing.
- Place furniture like bookshelves against walls to reduce noise coming from the other side.
- Turn off noisy fan heaters or cooling systems.

## Competing noise

Hearing adults can filter out unwanted noise and focus on the speaker. Young children need the speaker's voice to be above the levels of other noise to hear what is said.

Here are some ideas to deal with competing noise:

- Reduce competing noise, for example, turn off the radio or don't play music when you are talking.
- Encourage other children to think about noise they make.
- Think about how and when you have noisy activities and how you will communicate with the deaf child.

## Distance

Sound gets quieter the further it travels, and hearing devices work best when the speaker is close.

- Always come close to the child when talking to them.
- Make sure children are seated 1 to 3m away when teaching or carrying out an activity.
- Use a radio aid to communicate with children when they are further away, for example, when they are playing outside.

All adults and children learn best in a good acoustic environment.



For more top tips on creating a good listening environment, go to [ndcs.org.uk/acoustics](https://ndcs.org.uk/acoustics).

## **Creating a good listening environment**

There are lots of ways that you can develop a child's listening skills through a good listening environment.

### **Model good listening**

Demonstrate how to attend and listen by looking at the child when they are talking to you. Take turns in back-and-forth exchanges even if it's non-verbal, such as a nod or smile. Show children how to ask if you haven't understood something, and practise using statements such as, "I liked the story, my favourite part was..." Children are more likely to respond when there is less pressure to deliver an answer.

### **Gain and maintain attention**

Always gain the deaf child's attention before you expect them to listen. Give them a specific focus to listen for (for example, stories with a repeating phrase that they can join in with will hold attention). Give the child a prop to participate with at a particular point in a story or rhyme.

### **Use listening prompts**

Create props to use as listening prompts. Familiarise the child with the props in a pre-tutoring activity and then use them while you are telling a story.

### **Allow time to listen and look**

Remember that some deaf children may find it very difficult to look and listen. Even with visual props, it's harder for a deaf child to integrate their attention, and they need practice. Give them time to look at a picture or object then look back to you as you speak. Use familiar stories – it's easier to look at pictures and listen when you know what's coming up.

## Listening and hearing technology

Personal hearing devices, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, and assistive listening technology, such as radio aids or streamers, can help children to perceive and discriminate speech sounds when they are in a good acoustic environment. We have more information on the range of hearing technology in Appendix B.

You can help by:

### Checking hearing technology is working properly

Hearing technology needs frequent checks as it can fail at any time. Ask your Teacher of the Deaf to help you to:

- find out from parents their routine for checking hearing technology
- undertake regular visual and listening checks, including checking batteries as these can fail at any time
- maintain a supply of accessories such as spare batteries and a puffer to remove moisture which can distort sound
- troubleshoot basic problems
- keep the technology clean, that is, free from sand, water and general dirt
- know what to do or who to contact if the technology stops working
- recognise any changes in a child's response to sound that may indicate their technology is not working or the child's hearing has changed.

### Using the technology consistently

It can be challenging at times to keep hearing devices on young children and babies or manage and monitor it with many competing priorities.

- Work with the family to manage, monitor and maintain their hearing technology on a day-to-day basis.
- Create a predictable and consistent routine so the child knows what to expect.
- Feedback when you see the child responding to sound, speech and language.
- Support families to talk about their concerns or challenges with equipment.
- Ask your Teacher of the Deaf or the family for top tips in keeping hearing tech in place (see one family's tips at [ndcs.org.uk/keep-hearing-aids-on](https://ndcs.org.uk/keep-hearing-aids-on)).

### Monitoring the child's hearing loss

There can be challenges with correctly identifying what young deaf children can and cannot hear, and just like all children, glue ear may reduce their hearing further.

- Observe how the child responds to sound in your setting. Children who are receiving too much sound through their hearing technology may startle easily or become distressed in noisy situations. Too little sound and they may appear unresponsive or in a world of their own.
- Record the development of speech sounds and check with the Teacher of the Deaf and/or speech and language therapist.
- Keep a record of the child's spoken language development. Children who are not developing language normally may not be getting enough access to sound through their hearing technology.
- Observe changes in listening and attention.
- Keep in close contact with the family and discuss your observations.



For further information, see our resource 'Hearing Aids: Information for families' ([ndcs.org.uk/hearingaidsguide](https://ndcs.org.uk/hearingaidsguide)) and watch our short films demonstrating how to care for equipment at [bit.ly/equipment-for-deaf-children](https://bit.ly/equipment-for-deaf-children).

## Radio aids

Many deaf babies and children benefit from using a radio aid with their hearing technology. The teacher's voice is picked up by a body-worn microphone and fed into a receiver attached to the child's hearing device.

When using radio aids, you should remember to:

- check the child's hearing device first before setting up the radio aid
- switch the transmitter on and pause a couple of seconds before you start talking
- place the microphone about 15cm from the mouth
- switch it off or mute the microphone when you are not talking to the deaf baby or child
- not stand next to anything noisy – the microphone is omni directional and will pick up noise in the environment
- avoid letting the microphone knock against clothing or jewellery.



The Teacher of the Deaf can tell you how to check, use and maintain the radio aid and when best to use it. For further information, see our resource 'How Radio Aids Can Help' at [ndcs.org.uk/radioaids](https://ndcs.org.uk/radioaids).

## Creating a positive behaviour environment

In theory, there should be no difference between behaviour approaches used for deaf children and other children. However, understanding others' feelings and emotions is a developmental milestone that can take longer for deaf children to reach.

It is important that deaf children explore emotions through positive relationships with a trusted adult as often and as routinely as possible. This can be done in a variety of ways, but books and social stories are particularly good at showcasing how others might be feeling. Use pondering questions and statements to open up conversations about behaviour and emotions – for example, “I wonder why he did that? If that happened to me, I’d be really sad!”

Children will need help to co-regulate their emotions before they can self-regulate and manage them alone, so it’s vital that adult expectations are set correctly and move with the child as they develop these skills.

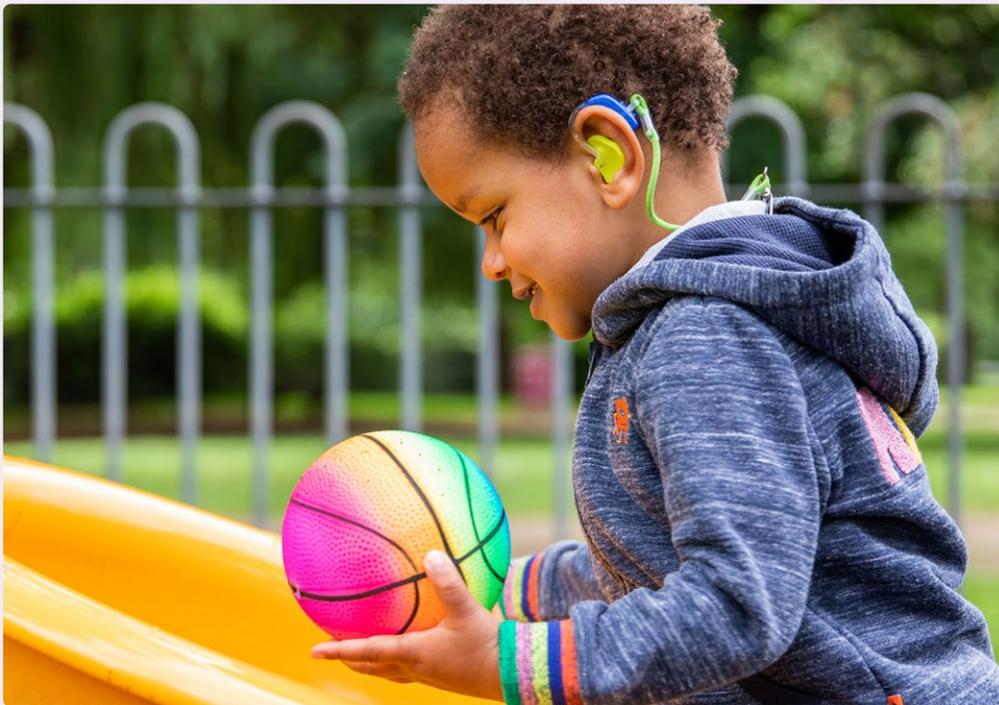
Deaf children may have trouble expressing themselves or understanding rules, so try the following simple tactics:

- Name emotions for the child: “I think you’re feeling angry because you’re tired, would you like to have a rest?”
- Create the setting’s rules with the children as a group so everyone is included in agreeing the boundaries.
- Think about the reasons behind the behaviour you might be seeing. The child may be feeling frustrated that they cannot hear or understand what is going on around them. They may also be tired from concentrating hard to listen and lip-read.
- Become familiar with the deaf child’s usual behaviour to establish when it may be an indicator of additional underlying causes or an expression of unmet need.

Remember, it is always the behaviour that is the problem, not the child. The behaviour is a sign of something that needs to be addressed, and this can normally be done through a positive and meaningful relationship rather than a time out or isolating a child from the rest of the group.

**You will:**

- create a good acoustic environment so that I can access speech and sound better
- know how to use my hearing technology and discuss any issues with my parents and Teacher of the Deaf
- know how to include me in everything I do by adapting your learning environment.



## 6 Supporting unique learning needs

Deaf children have unique learning needs and may need extra support with:

- listening
- attention and concentration
- language development
- phonological awareness
- early literacy skills
- working memory
- auditory memory
- processing time
- learning to think things through and problem solve
- understanding their emotions and that of others.

Here are some ideas to help deaf children to learn alongside their peers:

Communication and language	Ideas for development
<p>Responding to the child’s communication attempts through spoken language, gesture and sign and supporting attention, listening and interaction skills will create the rich language environment deaf children need.</p>	<p>Comment on the things that the child looks at and is attending to, such as other children, animals or favourite toys.</p> <p>Make links by pointing to what you’re talking or signing about.</p> <p>Copy the child’s sounds and movements and wait for them to make them back.</p> <p>Make your voice interesting and use gesture and signs to keep the child’s interest.</p> <p>Play visual tracking, and touch and anticipation games, for example, ‘peek-a-boo’.</p> <p>Use language and gesture to comment upon and direct the child’s behaviour – extend your arms as you ask the child to come.</p> <p>Add to and increase the length and complexity of your language. The child will understand much more than they can say or sign.</p>

	<p>Use everyday routines to repeat simple signs, words and phrases over and over again as well as the sounds that represent objects or things, like ‘meow’ for cat.</p> <p>Follow the child’s lead, even when it’s difficult to understand what they’re trying to say.</p> <p>Ask simple questions starting with ‘what’ or ‘where’.</p> <p>Repeat the child’s words/signs/sentences, adding new information so they can see how a longer sentence can be.</p> <p>Put what you think and what you think the child is thinking about into words and signs – this helps show children how we think about the world around us.</p> <p>Make sure the child has lots of opportunities to see others communicating.</p> <p>Spend time sharing books, using pictures to help.</p> <p>Discuss events, what you’re going to do, where you’re going or what you’ve done – remember to talk about thoughts and feelings.</p> <p>Help the child get their needs met using language, for example, if they want to play a game or with a toy, discuss what they could say to another child and model it for them.</p>
<b>Listening and vocalising</b>	<b>Ideas for development</b>
<p>Deaf children learning spoken language will be using their hearing technology and learning how to listen and attend to spoken language to learn to speak.</p>	<p>Make technology part of the child’s routine. Encourage the child to use their hearing device while they are with you.</p> <p>Talk to the child about their hearing technology as you check it and use language such as, “Can you hear?”</p> <p>Try and reduce background noise as much as possible, especially when you are communicating.</p> <p>Make sure the child can see your face and mouth as you speak.</p>

	<p>Share books with the child, using key phrases and noises as you do.</p> <p>Rephrase and expand what the child is saying. For example, if the child says “Bibi”, you could say, “Biscuit, do you want a biscuit?”</p> <p>Play interactive games using songs and rhymes with familiar themes – make these more interesting to listen to by using a strong beat, rhythm and lots of repetition.</p> <p>Draw the child’s attention to the noises toys and animals make.</p> <p>Use toys, puppets and other objects to encourage interaction.</p> <p>Play simple anticipation games, encouraging the child to join in, for example, ‘Are you ready, steady, go!’</p> <p>Play games where children must find noise-making objects or identify objects by the sounds that they make.</p> <p>Make listening ears and go outside on a listening walk – what can you hear?</p> <p>Jingle, rustle, scrunch, or shake something in a box where the children can’t see – they must guess what’s in the box, for example, a bunch of keys.</p> <p>Listen to different pieces of music and move in response to the tone, pitch and volume of the music, for example, ‘Mars’ from Gustav Holst’s The Planets.</p> <p>Give directions and information immediately before something’s due to happen, for example, when you’re about to go out, talk about where you’re going and what you’ll need.</p> <p>Ask children to copy rhythms and rhymes.</p>
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Social skills	Ideas for development
<p>Modelling good social routines, supporting children to develop social communication and helping them to understand and label their own feelings and that of others, will help deaf children to develop positive and beneficial relationships.</p>	<p>Respond to the child’s attempt to communicate with an encouraging voice or game they enjoy.</p> <p>Play turn-taking and cooperative games.</p> <p>Offer choices where appropriate: “Do you want carrots or banana?”</p> <p>Have happy goodbye routines when you and family members leave each other.</p> <p>Provide regular chances for the child to play beside children the same age and allow them to play on their own.</p> <p>Use ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to clearly set reasonable limits – briefly explain your reasons and be consistent.</p> <p>Talk about changes in routines.</p> <p>Encourage the child to help with jobs, such as tidying up, placing clothes in drawers, or putting away toys.</p> <p>Model social language such as hello, goodbye, please and thank you.</p> <p>Communicate about the child's emotions – “Your face tells me you’re feeling sad or upset”.</p> <p>Suggest ways to deal with feelings: “When you feel angry, come and get a grown-up for help”.</p> <p>Read stories that explore emotions and discuss them.</p> <p>Give lots of praise for positive behaviours, like helping to find or fetch something.</p> <p>Encourage pretend play with dolls and stuffed animals to help practise emotional responses.</p> <p>Discuss how the child’s behaviour may affect others – “You took away Tom’s toy, I think this made Tom feel sad”.</p> <p>Give children strategies to repair relationships when things go wrong.</p>

Early literacy	Ideas for development
<p>Babies are learning about reading and writing from birth through everyday interactions, routines and experiences. The more language children have, the more ready they are for reading literacy. It's never too early to start sharing books and talking about the words and writing they see and hear in their world.</p>	<p><b>Developing phonological awareness</b></p> <p>Draw attention to sounds in the environment.</p> <p>Make sure the child can see your face when you're talking – they can match what they're hearing with what they can see on your lips.</p> <p>Vary your tone, pace and pitch. Make your voice interesting and use lots of intonation and expression.</p> <p>Change your speech volume according to the event, for example, talk quietly if someone is asleep, or loudly if you're calling out.</p> <p>Use gesture and actions to draw attention to the different sounds in language. For example, 'wheeee!' as you push them on the swing or 'up' as you pick them up.</p> <p>Sing and sign songs and rhymes to help them learn about rhythm, rhyme and alliteration.</p> <p>Use simple signs and visual cues to help them to remember letters and sounds.</p> <p><b>Book sharing</b></p> <p>Sit the child where they can see the book and your face.</p> <p>Show the book to the child ahead of time so they have some idea of the story's sequence and any new names or vocabulary. Consider giving the deaf child a copy of the book they could read along with at the same time.</p> <p>Tell the story using the pictures and connect the story to real life experiences as well as reading it. Use lots of facial expressions and intonation.</p> <p>Ask questions such as, "What do you think will happen next?" or "How do you think he felt?"</p> <p>If the child is learning sign language, use signs to go with the words in the story (it will be fun for other children to learn the new signs and will reinforce their learning of new words too).</p>

	<p>Play with the rhymes, repeat phrases, and every now and again put in a wrong word and see if the child notices.</p> <p>Use props and objects to bring the story to life and encourage children to act out parts of the story.</p>
<b>Early maths skills</b>	<b>Ideas for development</b>
<p>Much of maths is linked to language and knowledge of the world, so the more mathematical language a deaf child has linked to everyday experiences, the more able they are to express, discuss and use early maths concepts.</p>	<p>Introduce early maths ideas and words in everyday routines and events such as setting the table, sorting washing or cooking.</p> <p>Use stories and books to reinforce a range of maths concepts including size, shape and number.</p> <p>Use role play and challenges to problem solve and discuss what you did and how you arrived at the solution. If the child has difficulty with telling you, let them show you instead and you can provide the correct terms.</p> <p>Link mathematical language and mathematical symbols.</p> <p>Make sure the deaf child knows the vocabulary in a maths word problem.</p> <p>Watch out for numbers which sound similar.</p>
<b>Executive functioning</b>	<b>Ideas for development</b>
<p>Like all children, deaf children do best in environments that support and promote healthy ways of thinking. This is sometimes known as a 'growth mindset'. Being resilient and problem solving is an important part of the child's learning journey.</p>	<p>Create a playful environment which engages the child's interests.</p> <p>Encourage different kinds of play, both outdoor play and indoor games.</p> <p>Follow the child's lead and let them tell you what to play.</p> <p>Play games which do and don't have rules.</p> <p>Allow the child to take and manage risks in their play.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to play by themselves as well as with others.</p>

	<p>Get involved in pretend play, such as shopping, cooking or getting ready to go out, and present simple scenarios, for example, “I haven’t got any food, what can I do?”</p> <p>Vary familiar games and encourage the child to find new ways of doing things.</p> <p>Encourage problem solving by wondering aloud: “I wonder what will happen if...?” Allow thinking time before expecting a response.</p> <p>Identify and label your and the child’s feelings and emotions and impulses. For example: “Are you tired and hungry? Is that why you don’t want to play this game?”</p> <p>Discuss how to respond to these feelings in the right way. For example: “I can see that you’re upset and frustrated. Why don’t you have a break and a snack. I know I feel more ready to work when I’ve had a rest.”</p> <p>Play games which help to develop self-regulation skills. These could be board games, card games or listening games like ‘Simon Says’.</p>
<b>Processing time</b>	<b>Ideas for development</b>
<p>All young children need more time to process new information, but deaf children may need even longer.</p>	<p>Give deaf children 10 seconds to process the question, formulate an answer, arrange all the words in the right order and then say them to you.</p> <p>Try giving one instruction at a time rather than many linked together: “Can you find your shoes? Well done, you’ve found them, now let’s line up at the door,” rather than, “Go and find your shoes and line up at the door”. Ensure the child has heard and understood the instruction or question.</p> <p>Allow the child time to use visual cues around the room to process information – for example, an instruction plus a visual timetable plus following the lead of other children will give the child confidence that they’re doing the correct thing.</p>

Working and auditory memory	Ideas for development
<p>Memory for words comes gradually as language develops, and deaf children benefit from support to expand their memory for what they have heard.</p> <p>You can make use of their visual memories using photos, pictures and objects to prompt recall of things they have enjoyed at home or at the setting with you.</p>	<p>Complete jigsaw puzzles together – start off simply and build complexity. Talk about the picture and what might be happening.</p> <p>Play memory games, such as ‘I went to the store and bought...’ or Kim’s Game (where one item from a tray of familiar items is removed secretly and the child guesses which item has disappeared).</p> <p>Play circle games like ‘Bug in a Rug’ where one child leaves the circle and covers their eyes while another child in the circle is hidden by a blanket or rug.</p> <p>Make use of their visual memories and objects to prompt recall of things they need to remember.</p> <p>Keep instructions simple and avoid long and complicated instructions.</p> <p>Remember, deaf children may be expending lots of energy working out what they must do and may find retaining lots of new spoken information hard.</p>
<p>Self-esteem</p>	<p>Talk about the child’s deafness and their hearing devices using positive language.</p> <p>Acknowledge when things are more difficult, like noisy environments or new routines, and how they can make you feel.</p> <p>Give children the tools and the language they need to say when things aren’t right and to ask for what they need, for example, letting you know if their hearing aid isn’t working.</p> <p>The fear of making mistakes or getting things wrong can stop children from trying something in the first place. Encourage the child not to worry about mistakes but to see them as learning opportunities.</p>

Encourage resilience and praise for not giving up, even when they find something difficult or frustrating. Help the child to believe that a challenge is a positive thing because it means their brains are growing.

Introduce positive deaf role models through stories, books or people that you know.



## Make new learning deaf-friendly

Using lots of visuals alongside spoken information will help deaf children to make sense of their world.

- Use facial expressions to support understanding. Make sure the child can see your face and lip patterns. For babies, copy their facial expressions and leave a space for them to reply.
- Use sign, touch or signals to get and keep the child's attention. You can use gestures, pointing, head movement or eye gaze to draw the child's attention to what you're talking about.
- Signal important routines, instructions and information by using symbols, objects, simple signs or gestures.
- Match speech sounds with actions and pictures to support understanding and engagement.
- Use a photo book to record special events, special people or everyday routines to encourage communication and language development or support understanding.
- Play visual tracking games by moving toys in the child's line of vision.
- Use pictures as well as word labels around your environment.
- Create visual timetables, schedules and choice boards to explain everyday routines.
- Introduce new vocabulary with objects and pictures.
- Use actions and gestures to show what you are doing as well as doing it.

## Make your timetable deaf-friendly

Deaf children may work harder to listen and lip-read, which means they can tire easily. This is sometimes called concentration fatigue. You can help manage their tiredness by doing the following:

- Try to keep activities short that require a lot of concentration or listening (such as stories or group work).
- Build in short breaks, for example, opportunities to do something active.
- Provide a quiet, cosy corner to allow children to self-regulate and be calm. Keep resources here to encourage relaxation and rest.
- Check in regularly and sensitively with the child to make sure they understand what is coming next.
- React kindly and consistently to any behaviour that is a direct result of tiredness.
- Talk to parents about what clues to look for to indicate tiredness and act when you notice these things.

## Make story time deaf-friendly

Stories and books are a great way to promote language and listening skills. You can help deaf children get more out of story time by doing the following:

- Pick a time of day when the child has more energy for listening; for example, first thing in the morning might be better than at the end of the day.
- Make sure the deaf child has a good view of your face and the pictures. Try to sit face-to-face or slightly sideways.
- When choosing a book, check to see if the pictures alone make sense. Some pictures may be a bit fuzzy or have too much detail, which makes it difficult for a child to follow the main character through the story. Allow extra time to look at pictures and to take in the information.
- Show the book to the deaf child ahead of time so they have some idea of the story's sequence and any new names or vocabulary. Consider giving the child a copy of the book so they can read along with you at the same time.
- Choose books with lots of repetition and rhymes.
- Use props and toys to help tell the story.

## Make group sessions deaf-friendly

Group sessions are a great way for children to share learning experiences and interact with each other and you. However, group sessions can sometimes be challenging for deaf children. Here are some ideas to help make deaf children feel included:

- Position the deaf child so they can easily see you and the other children. Sitting in a circle or horseshoe is a great way for everyone to see each other.
- Repeat what the other children say. Young children's voices are high, and their speech can be unclear.
- Encourage other children to speak one at a time and signal before they talk to allow the deaf child to see their faces. You could use a visual prop, for example, passing around a teddy when it's someone's turn to talk.
- Try to reduce noise rather than speak over it. Children will learn more if everyone is listening to one another and taking turns.

## Make music time deaf-friendly

Deaf children can enjoy and respond to music just like other children. Here are some things you can do to make music accessible:

- Sing lots of action songs or add in some simple signs to familiar songs.
- Encourage children to copy and create rhythms with their bodies.
- Share the words of the songs with families and repeat lots so children can become familiar and confident.
- Think about how and when you use musical instruments. Some children will be sensitive to certain volumes or pitches.



You can find out more ways to help deaf children to access and enjoy music at [ndcs.org.uk/music](https://ndcs.org.uk/music).

## Make outdoor activities deaf-friendly

Depending on your location, the outside environment may have a lot of background or competing noises. Here are some ideas to help deaf children when outside:

- Use lots of visuals to help children understand outside routines and rules and make them aware of safety issues.
- Use visual signals to give instructions.
- Ask another child to be a 'hearing buddy' who can help cue the deaf child into expectations and routines.
- Radio aids can be very helpful when you're outside (see Chapter 5 for more on radio aids).

## Making observations, planning and assessments deaf-friendly

You may need to adapt your observation, assessment and planning processes for deaf babies or children to consider their developmental and learning needs. For example, it is possible to under or overestimate deaf children's performance. A deaf child may appear to have good spoken language if they talk a lot, but they may be using a limited selection of learnt phrases, or a deaf child may say very little but understand lots.

When you are observing and planning for deaf children, you will be finding out if they can do the following:

1. Access your learning environment and be fully included in everything you do by identifying potential barriers and planning for these. You may want to assess and monitor:
  - the acoustic environment
  - the communication environment
  - the learning environment
  - the effectiveness of hearing technology.
2. Have the necessary skills which will allow them to make progress with their development and learning. You may want to observe, monitor and assess:
  - listening and attention skills
  - communication and language development
  - speech production
  - early maths and literacy skills
  - social skills and play skills
  - emotional health and wellbeing.

Where the child has a Teacher of the Deaf (ToD), their ToD will carry out formal testing to assess their progress. Your ongoing recordings and observations will play a key part in building a comprehensive picture of the deaf child's development.



We have many resources to help parents and teachers to build positive relationships and look after deaf children's mental health, from building a positive deaf identity to recognising the signs of a mental health condition, at [ndcs.org.uk/childmentalhealth](https://ndcs.org.uk/childmentalhealth).

## Responding to delays in language development

Language underpins all learning. If you notice any delays in language development, you should have a discussion with everyone who supports the child. Many deaf children will benefit from some extra support or opportunities to practise language in a small intervention group.

Where there is a specific language difficulty, the child may need targeted support through an agreed additional language programme. This could be delivered by you, the Teacher of the Deaf, or a speech and language therapist.

If the child's language development continues to be slow, they may be experiencing additional language barriers such as noisy environments, problems with hearing technology, drop in hearing thresholds or additional learning needs.

Parents can also make a valuable contribution in accurately assessing the needs of their child. They can alert you to any worries their child may have about keeping up with their peers or if they are not able to apply their learning to life outside the setting.

### Learning goals

Assessment should help identify the additional support the child needs to achieve a learning goal. This support may be provided by early years staff with advice from specialists or by specialists themselves, depending on the needs of the child. The success of this intervention on the child's progress will be measured to inform future support.

The deaf child may need assessments which look at specific areas of development (for example, vocabulary, sign language or listening skills). These assessments can be carried out by the Teacher of the Deaf or a speech and language therapist.

### Additional needs

Assessment should identify learning needs in addition to deafness. This is an area that needs careful monitoring and regular discussion between the key worker, early years staff and Teacher of the Deaf to ensure that the additional needs that a deaf child may experience are not disguised by their deafness.



Our web pages on assessment will support Teachers of the Deaf and other education professionals to carry out specialist assessments for deaf children. They will also be useful for those involved in any needs assessments and the resulting plans, as well as specialist education support – [ndcs.org.uk/assessments](https://ndcs.org.uk/assessments).

**You will:**

- understand how I learn best
- have high aspirations for my language and communication development
- encourage a rich language environment both at home and in my early years setting
- know how to make all activities and learning deaf-friendly so I get the most out of learning and teaching
- use observation, monitoring and assessment to know how to meet my unique needs.





# 7

## Transition to primary school

Starting school is an exciting and challenging time for any child. When preparing deaf children for school, it may be helpful for them and their parents to know what to expect:

- Longer and more structured school days – deaf children can become very tired due to concentration fatigue.
- A wider range of listening environments to navigate, for example, classroom, hall, canteen and playground.
- New routines around managing hearing technology.
- Greater demand on communication and language, including new school-related vocabulary.
- New demands on social skills with new classmates and teachers.
- A new timetable, new events and different experiences to navigate.



### Information for parents

The education and learning section on our website has lots of ideas for parents on choices around schools, preparing their child for the move, and helping them get the most out of school – [ndcs.org.uk/primary-school](https://ndcs.org.uk/primary-school).

### Agreeing a transition plan

Transition plans are a great way to start the process of thinking about moving on to school and should be prepared well in advance of the child starting primary school. Families' aspirations and knowledge should inform the content.

Deaf children in Scotland with identified additional learning needs who are starting at primary school will need to follow the transitions guidance as laid out in Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017.<sup>8</sup>

8. For information about the 'Additional support for learning: statutory guidance 2017', go to [gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland](https://gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland).

The transfer plan should include:

### Information about the child

- Child's details and information about their deafness.
- List of professionals who support the child.
- Most recent plans and assessments, as well as further planned arrangements for assessing the child's needs.

### Information for the child

- Scheduled familiarisation or taster days so the child and parents can see the school and meet key staff members.
- Accessible information about the school such as a map, timetable (including information about breaks and lunchtimes), photos of relevant staff, and information on who can help with any concerns.

### Preparation plans for the primary school

- An acoustic audit of teaching spaces and the measures required to improve the listening environment.
- Ensuring that any hearing technology such as radio aids or a soundfield system is in place in good time.
- Arrangements for providing primary school staff with information on the child's needs and how they are best supported in accessing teaching and learning.
- Arrangements for deaf awareness training for staff and other children.
- Arrangements for meeting social needs including continuity of existing friendship groups.
- Arrangements for having the teaching assistant or communication support worker in place for the start of term, if appropriate.

Don't forget to use the information on transition planning in Chapter 4 to make sure you have included all the information that the new school will need.

#### **You will:**

- support me, my parents and my new primary school to develop a transfer plan that is right for me
- help me to be ready for school and to have the best start.



# 8 Appendices

## Appendix A: Types and levels of deafness

### Conductive deafness and glue ear

Conductive deafness occurs when sound cannot pass through the outer and middle ear to reach the cochlea and auditory nerve in the inner ear. Conductive deafness can be permanent or temporary. The most common cause of conductive deafness during childhood is a temporary build-up of fluid in the middle ear known as 'glue ear'.

Up to 80% of children will experience an episode of glue ear by the time they are aged 10. It's estimated that 1 in 5 four-year-olds will be affected by glue ear at any one time. Teachers, particularly those teaching the youngest children, will have several children in their class who are having trouble hearing.

For some children, glue ear can reduce hearing considerably for a long time, and this has a significant impact on learning and progress.

### Sensorineural deafness

Sensorineural deafness is a permanent hearing loss in the inner ear. It is generally caused by loss or damage to the hair cells in the cochlea but may also be caused by the auditory (hearing) nerve itself not working.

Children can have both conductive deafness and sensorineural deafness, and this is known as mixed deafness.

### Congenital and acquired deafness

Congenital deafness refers to children who are born deaf. Other children acquire deafness due to illness, accident or a late onset genetic condition.

### Levels of hearing loss

Deafness is measured in two ways:

- how loud the sound must be so that the child can hear it, measured in decibels
- which frequencies (pitch) the child can or cannot hear, measured in hertz.

Each child's deafness is different depending on which frequencies are affected and how loud a sound must be for them to hear it.

Few children are totally deaf. Most children can hear some sounds at certain pitches and volumes, known as their 'residual hearing'. There are different levels of deafness classified as follows.

## **Mild deafness**

For many children, a mild hearing loss doesn't require hearing devices such as hearing aids, but it may still have a significant impact on education. Children with a mild hearing loss can usually hear everything that's said to them in a quiet room, but not if there is background noise or if they are far away from the speaker. They are not able to follow a whispered conversation.

## **Moderate deafness**

Most children with moderate deafness will use hearing aids.

- With hearing aids, they are likely to be able to follow a conversation within a quiet room.
- Without hearing aids, they are likely to be able to hear most of what someone says to them within a quiet room as long as they speak clearly.

They will find it extremely difficult to follow a conversation in a large group if there is background noise or they are far away from the speaker.

## **Severe deafness**

- With hearing aids or a cochlear implant, most children who are severely deaf will be able to follow a conversation within a quiet room, provided that the speaker is within two to three metres of them.
- Without hearing aids or a cochlear implant, a child will be unable to access conversation at normal levels but may be able to hear loud sounds such as a dog barking or a drum.

A child with severe deafness is likely to require additional communication support, for example, sign support or lip-reading, to understand speech in the presence of any background noise or within a group conversation. Even with support, they may find it extremely difficult to understand speech in the presence of background noise.

## **Profound deafness**

Most profoundly deaf children will use a cochlear implant or hearing aids.

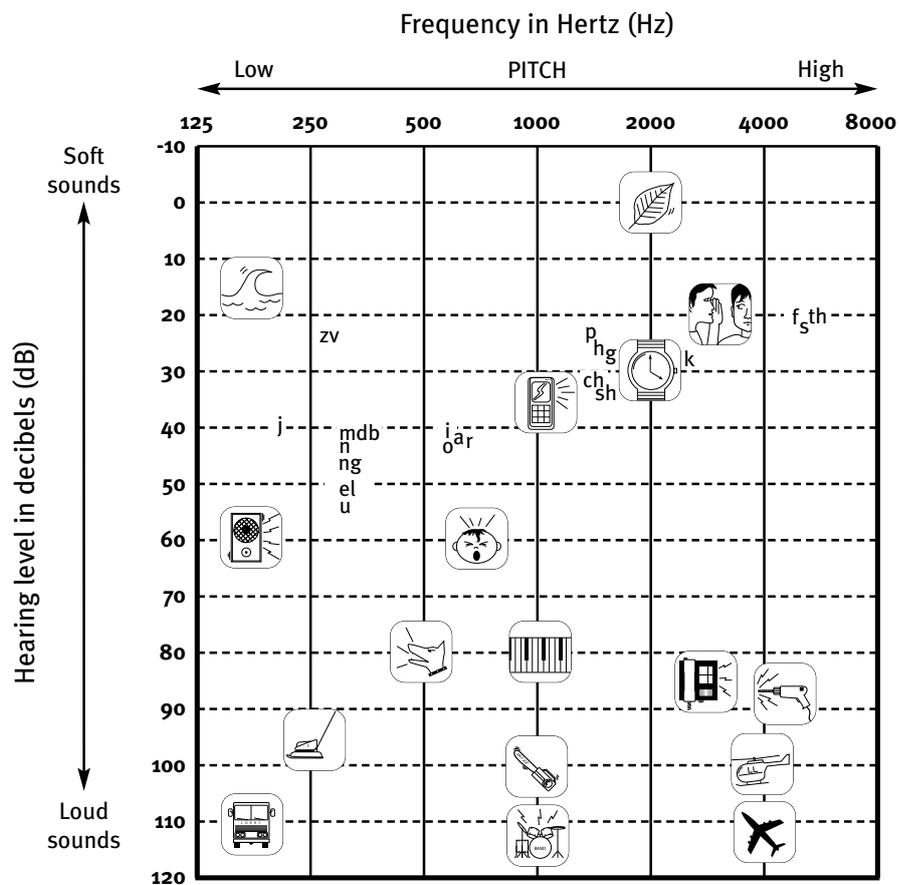
- With cochlear implants or hearing aids, the child may require additional communication support (for example, through sign language or cued speech) to access speech, especially with background noise or within a group conversation.
- Without a cochlear implant or hearing aids, a child will not be able to hear speech or other sounds. They may be able to feel very loud sounds such as a lorry passing them in the street. They may use sign-based language to communicate directly with another person.

In the presence of background noise, the child will find it more difficult to understand speech.

Some children may have an absence or malformation of the cochlea or auditory nerve. This will mean they will have no direct access to sound at all. In these situations, hearing aids or cochlear implants would offer no benefit. They will, therefore, likely use sign language as their main means of communication.

### Audiogram

The Teacher of the Deaf will be able to explain the individual deaf child's level of hearing by using an audiogram, similar to the one below. An audiogram is a chart used by an audiologist to record the results of the hearing assessment and is a visual representation of the child's hearing.



This diagram is based on the British Society of Audiology's definition of hearing loss.

### Unilateral deafness

Unilateral deafness occurs when there is little or no hearing in one ear, but ordinary levels of hearing in the other.

The child will be unable to localise sound and will find it difficult to follow group conversations or understand speech in the presence of background noise.

## **Auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder**

Auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder occurs when there are faults which affect how sound is transmitted along parts of the auditory nervous system. It affects the brain's ability to process all sound, including speech. Children will experience fluctuating hearing levels and often find it difficult to access speech, especially in the presence of background noise. Some children with auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder will use hearing aids or cochlear implants; others will not find them beneficial and will therefore not use them.

## **Deaf culture**

About 10% of deaf children have deaf parents. These families often use British Sign Language (BSL)<sup>9</sup> as their first language and consider deafness as a culture rather than a disability. Within their community, they can communicate and function effectively with each other. They describe themselves as 'Deaf' with a capital D. British Sign Language is the language of the Deaf community.

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9. Where the deaf child lives in Northern Ireland, Irish Sign Language may be used.

## Appendix B: Hearing technology

Deaf children you work with may rely on various hearing technologies. The following is an overview of the types of technology you may come across, how they work and what limitations they have. It's important to note that hearing technologies do not replace normal hearing.

### Hearing aids

A hearing aid amplifies sound and is worn in or behind the ear. It has three basic parts: a microphone, amplifier and speaker. Modern digital hearing aids can be programmed to closely match the wearer's hearing loss.

Hearing aids are designed to maximise the hearing the wearer has (known as their residual hearing). If the child has no measurable hearing at all at certain frequencies, especially the higher frequencies such as 'ss' and 'th', then a hearing aid will not improve this.

Hearing aids are programmed to help the wearer hear speech, but they amplify all sounds, including background noise, so a deaf child wearing aids may still find it hard to hear speech. This may be especially challenging for them in group situations in a noisy playground or open plan breakout space.



For more information on hearing aids, see our resource 'Hearing Aids: Information for families' at [ndcs.org.uk/hearingaidsguide](https://ndcs.org.uk/hearingaidsguide).

## Cochlear implants

This is a surgically implanted hearing device for severely and profoundly deaf children when hearing aids are not powerful enough for them to hear the entire speech range. A cochlear implant works by stimulating the auditory nerves and bypassing the damaged nerve cells within the cochlea.



For more information on cochlear implants, see our resource 'Cochlear Implants: Information for families' at [ndcs.org.uk/ciguide](https://ndcs.org.uk/ciguide).

### **Bone conduction hearing systems**

A bone conduction hearing device is designed for people who have a functioning cochlea, but the middle or outer part of the ear prevents information reaching the cochlea in the usual way.

A bone conduction hearing implant consists of a sound processor that is held on the head behind the ear. This might be clipped to a fixture known as an 'abutment' – a small titanium screw that has been implanted in the skull just behind the ear (known as a bone-anchored hearing aid) – or with a magnet holding the processor in place. This allows sound to be conducted through the bone rather than through the ear canal and middle ear.

However, the surgery for bone conduction hearing implants cannot usually be done until the age of four. Young children may use the sound processor attached to a soft headband. In this case, the soft headband can be taken on and off like other bone conduction hearing aids.



For further information, see our web page on bone conduction hearing devices at [ndcs.org.uk/boneconduction](https://ndcs.org.uk/boneconduction).

## Radio aids

A radio aid carries the teacher's voice directly to the child's receiver attached to their hearing aid, bone conduction hearing implant or cochlear implant. It reduces some of the problems presented by distance from the teacher and background noise. The microphone is worn by the teacher, and the receiver is worn by the child and attached to their hearing technology.

Some radio aids can be used by children without personal hearing technology by wearing an earpiece receiver. This may be particularly useful for children with unilateral deafness with the earpiece worn in their hearing ear.

Most children will have their hearing technology programmed to allow them to hear from both the radio aid and their surroundings. This means they can hear other children as well as the teacher. However, it's possible to programme their hearing technology to only hear the radio aid. Some radio aids have a microphone function which switches from an individual talker to a small group interaction mode, based on the orientation of the device. This is particularly useful for group work. Otherwise, the microphone can be passed to pupils speaking in group work or class discussion to aid clarity.

The radio aid microphone can also be connected to equipment such as televisions or computers via an audio lead to assist clarity.



For further information, see our resource 'How Radio Aids Can Help' at [ndcs.org.uk/radioaids](https://ndcs.org.uk/radioaids).

### **Soundfield systems**

Soundfield systems transmit sounds from a radio or wireless microphone worn by the teacher to loudspeakers placed around the room. They project the teacher's voice at a consistent level around the setting. These systems can improve the listening conditions for all children in a setting.

Portable systems are available that can be moved between learning spaces as required. Some systems can link with other hearing technology such as a radio aid or classroom equipment such as smartboards.

A child may need to use radio aids alongside the soundfield system, and both can be set up to work side by side.

## **Appendix C: Communication and language**

The information below covers the variety of communication options for deaf children. It's important to find out from families about how they communicate with their child.

### **Spoken language**

About 90% of deaf children are from families with no first-hand experience of deafness. It's important to remember that whichever language is used in the home, the child could still experience a significant delay. In many cases, spoken language will be supported by signing and lip-reading.

### **Speech reading/lip-reading**

Speech reading or lip-reading has an important role in helping children access spoken language. Children under four will not yet be skilled lip-readers. However, by watching faces closely, they will be using a range of visual clues to give context to and to aid their understanding of what is being said. As their speech and lip-reading skills develop, they will play an increasingly important role in helping children access spoken language. Lip patterns of spoken words can help the deaf child identify what is being said and support the interpretation of the speech sounds that can be heard. If used on its own it has several limitations, but it is a natural support to understanding spoken communication that all of us use and is especially helpful to the deaf child.

### **British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL)**

Some deaf children will be using BSL as their first language. BSL is a visual language that uses hand shapes, facial expression, gestures, body language and fingerspelling. It has a structure and grammar different from that of written and spoken English or Welsh. Many children using BSL will also develop spoken English or Welsh. Deaf children brought up by deaf parents will often start school with age or near age-appropriate language in BSL. In Northern Ireland, some families will use ISL.

### **Sign Supported English (SSE) or Sign Supported Welsh**

For many children, their spoken language may be supported with signs taken from BSL. When signs are used to support spoken English or Welsh in this way, it's known as Sign Supported English or Sign Supported Welsh. This is used to add clarity to what is being said, for example, in situations where they may struggle with background noise or if they are too distant from the speaker.

## **Cued speech**

Cued speech is a lip-reading tool that enables access to spoken language visually. It uses eight hand shapes in four different positions and accompanies natural speech. Whereas some sounds cannot be fully lip-read (for example, 'p', 'm' and 'b' all look the same on the lips and sounds like 'k' and 'g' cannot be seen at all), the cues make it clear exactly what sound is used so that the deaf child may see the sound in each word as it is spoken in real time. This enables the child to develop an understanding of the spoken language regardless of whether they have any hearing or not.

# About the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP)

This resource has been developed by the National Deaf Children's Society with support from the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP). NatSIP is a partnership of organisations working together to improve outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment (SI).

For more information about NatSIP and for access to resources, visit [natsip.org.uk](http://natsip.org.uk) – a major gateway for SI professional practice.

# About the National Deaf Children's Society

We're here for every deaf child who needs us – no matter what their level or type of deafness or how they communicate. We want to work with professionals like you to overcome the barriers that hold deaf children back.

Visit our website [ndcs.org.uk](http://ndcs.org.uk) to join us for free. You'll have access to:

- our expert information resources for professionals
- our quarterly digital magazine and email updates
- our workshops and events
- our Freephone Helpline.

**We are the National Deaf Children's Society,  
the leading charity for deaf children.**

**Freephone Helpline:**

0808 800 8880 (voice and text)

helpline@ndcs.org.uk

**ndcs.org.uk**



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