



Deaf, deaf and Hard of Hearing

About Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing

The term “Deaf” (capitalised D) describes individuals who communicate using Australian Sign Language (Auslan). These individuals identify as belonging to the signing Deaf community, which is like a different ethnic group; it has its own language and culture. Deaf people often interact with both the Deaf and hearing communities, but do not consider themselves to be “hearing impaired”.

In contrast, the term “deaf” (lower case d) describes individuals who physically do not hear, as well as those who do not identify as members of the signing Deaf community.

“Hard of hearing” describes individuals who have a mild to moderate hearing loss, or who have developed hearing loss in late childhood or adulthood. People who are hard of hearing typically use spoken language (including lip-reading) to communicate. They may also rely on residual hearing (possibly with use of a hearing aid), written language, or gestures.

“Hearing impaired” is also often used in Australia to describe people who are hard of hearing, but this is generally not the preferred term.

Using the wrong word to describe a person’s hearing can be offensive, so it is important to ask the child and their family which group they identify with.

Strengths

What might be some strengths?

- Some children can participate successfully like their peers when given clear and specific instructions.
- Some children are strong visual learners, and are able to mentally hold and manipulate visual information (e.g. picture an object and rotate that picture in their mind).



Where you might provide support?

- Some children may need support to stay focussed on tasks and other activities.
- Some children may need support with interacting with peers and building relationships.

Evidence-based strategies

Consider adjustments to teaching style

- **Check that you have the child's attention.** When giving instructions or communicating with the child, maintain eye contact and check that the child can see your face and mouth.
- **Allow more time.** Some children may need more time to process information and answer questions (e.g. via the use of sign language, picture or gestures).
- **Check in.** Frequently check in to see if the child understands instructions and activities.
- **Communicate in different ways.** Consider including visual methods of communication, such as posters, role plays, captioned videos, storyboards and visual schedules.

Make adjustments to activities and equipment

- **Allow children to use technology or assistive devices.** Deaf and hard of hearing children may have different ways of communicating. Some might use assistive technologies such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, and may communicate using pictures or gestures. Consider how you can incorporate these into activities.
- **Maximise technology.** Some children may have communication aids to assist with participation. For example, a transmitter and microphone may be needed so a child can pick up verbal communication. Encourage children and families to use technology that best supports them.
- **Provide plenty of opportunities for peer interaction.** Consider providing small group work, buddies and role playing. It may be helpful to teach hearing children how to best communicate with their Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing peers. This could involve teaching key Auslan signs to all the children.



Best practice tips

Work with the child's parents and support team

- Consider asking parents and the child's support team about communication methods used at home, and learning some of these

Communicate in different ways

- Include visual methods of communication, such as demonstrating a task or idea, posters, role plays, Auslan captioned videos, storyboards and visual schedules.

Check the learning environment has plenty of light

- That way the child can better see visual material and demonstrations. This will also help with lip-reading or if an interpreter is present. When communicating with the child, check that you are not standing directly in front of windows and light sources.

Be aware of noise levels

- Noisy environments may distract children who use hearing aids, cochlear implants and other assistive listening devices.

Give corrective feedback

- Provide correction immediately if the child mispronounces words, sentences, or engages in disruptive behaviours. Consider how this can be done without causing embarrassment. For example, repeat what the child has said with the correct word or sentence structure rather than pointing out the incorrect word.

Allow time to practice

- Some children may need to practise a task or behaviour many times. Encourage the child to practise in different settings and with different materials so they learn to use that skill in other places.



Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Educators can help support children's learning and participation by creating a secure and positive social environment where they can build relationships with educators and other children.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Deaf and hard of hearing children may benefit from a text-rich environment. Consider using visual schedules and posters to illustrate key learning concepts.
- Provide plenty of opportunities for peer interactions during learning and play to help children communicate with others and build relationships.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Encouraging positive attitudes, body language and communication styles can make a big difference in the play and learning experiences of Deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Provide warm and calm support to a child when they are distressed, and acknowledge their emotions.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Having a consistent and predictable routine can help children know what is coming up, so if they miss some verbal information they still have an idea of what is happening.
- Reading texts multiple times can help children understand how to pronounce and write words. It may be helpful to ask the child questions and explain the meanings of words.
- It might be helpful to combine learning with hands-on activities. This might encourage the child to put concepts into practice, and provide meaning to what is being learned. For example, consider reading a storybook that focuses on an everyday experience (e.g. sharing, making friends) and follow it with role playing activities.
- Consider using activities that will engage multiple senses (e.g. sight and smell) to reinforce learning and play skills.



Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Some Deaf and hard of hearing children might use assistive technologies such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, and may communicate using tablets, pictures or gestures. Consider how you can incorporate these in activities.
- Look for opportunities to encourage children to communicate. For example, ask them to make a choice or to tell you more about something they have said.
- It might be helpful to work collaboratively with a sign language interpreter, to support the child's learning. Consider learning some key signs that could help with communication in the early childhood education and care setting.

Other considerations

Safety

- Some Deaf and hard of hearing children may not know what to do in an emergency or emergency drill. Consider spending time demonstrating and practising what to do and how you will communicate to them if an audio siren/alarm sounds.

Behaviour

- Stories about social situations can highlight expected behaviours and routines in the early childhood education and care setting.
- Refer to the [ABC approach](#) for more information on how to reduce challenging behaviour by supporting the child and promoting more helpful behaviour, and our [emotions page](#) for more information about supporting a child with managing their emotions.

Toileting/hygiene

- Some Deaf and hard of hearing children may have trouble alerting an adult to toileting needs.
- Work collaboratively with the child and their parents/support team. Discuss any additional communication strategies (e.g. gestures) that may help in this area.

Relief educators

- Consider documenting the strengths and needs of the child, and providing this to other early childhood educators and professionals that are involved in supporting the child at the early childhood education and care setting.



Transitions

- A child who is Deaf or hard of hearing may find moving from the early childhood education and care setting to another setting (i.e. another early childhood setting or primary school) challenging.
- For more information about supporting children with disabilities when transitioning to a different education setting, access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).

Other co-occurring conditions

- Children who are Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing can sometimes also experience [blind and low vision](#) and [communication](#) challenges.
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the child.

Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for children who are Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Emotion cards (A4)
- Stay play talk poster
- AllPlay Learn Story - Making friends
- AllPlay Learn Story - A day at childcare
- AllPlay Learn Story - A day at kindergarten
- AllPlay Learn Story - Sharing