

Supporting Pupils in Early Years Settings

Deaf children have the potential to attain and achieve the same as any other child, given the right support. However, as most teaching and learning is mediated through language this presents deaf children with challenges in terms of accessing the teaching and learning and socialisation. It is important, therefore, to understand each child's level of hearing, the type of hearing technology used and their preferred way of communicating.

Below is a list of general advice that will help the deaf child in your setting access learning, communicate and socialise, thus reaching their full potential. There is also a link to additional information on the National Deaf Children's Society website.

Added to this, the IDS Hearing Team, together with Speech and Language Therapy, offer the training course 'Language Learning in the Early Years' for Early Years practitioners. Ask your Teacher of the Deaf for further details.

How to create a good listening environment

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are not selective. As well as speech the microphone picks up all sounds from around the wearer. Deaf children will find it difficult to listen if there is a lot of reverberation and echo in a room and if there is a lot of background noise that drowns out the voice of those speaking. You can help by: -

- Fitting soft furnishings such as curtains, blinds and rugs and by hanging fabric on walls and other hard surfaces.
- Closely monitoring noise levels in a room
- Closing doors and windows to outside noise
- Turning off noisy equipment when it is not in use
- Ensuring heating systems operate within acceptable noise levels through regular maintenance.

You should also make good use of technology such as radio aids and mini mics.

Good communication approaches

- Make sure hearing technology such as hearing aids, cochlear implants are working properly and worn consistently. Your Teacher of the Deaf can provide training on this.
- Make sure you have the child's attention before you start talking
- Speak clearly and at your normal pace. Shouting and whispering and talking either too slowly or too quickly distorts lip patterns
- When speaking directly to a deaf child always get down to their eye level so they can focus on your speech and tune into what you are saying
- Face deaf pupils when speaking to them. Putting something in front of your face or turning away will make it difficult for a child to read facial expressions and lip patterns.
- Ensure you do not stand with your back to a light source, as a shadow cast across your face can obstruct the deaf child's view.
- For those children who rely on watching a speaker's face allow them time to move their attention between the person talking and any visual support
- Create 'quiet zones' within the setting where children can engage in quieter activities and where it will be easier for the deaf child to hear and communicate with their peers.



Teaching strategies

- Sit deaf pupils near to you so they can see you clearly. Make sure they can see other pupils too. Sitting the children in a circle facilitates this.
- Repeat the contributions and questions of the other children.
- Foster good turn taking during speaking and listening activities.
- Introduce the topic you are going to talk about and aim to stick to it. Be clear when you have finished and are going to talk about something else.
- Use objects, photos and pictures to support what is being said. Visual aids ensure that the child is not just relying on listening and lipreading for information. They are helpful in illustrating new concepts and vocabulary and providing a context for a new subject or situation. They are also helpful in supporting routines and instructions.
- Provide opportunities to prepare/ pre-teach children new concepts and vocabulary before it is introduced with the larger group. For example, you might share a book several times before it is read to all the children. Alternatively, you might explore a feely bag of objects relevant to a forthcoming topic.
- Check understanding of verbal instructions/ new learning by asking open ended questions or choice questions. Alternatively ask children to demonstrate their understanding using objects/ visual aids.
- During 'free-flow' play adults should follow the child's lead and simplify their language to get the most out of play and communication opportunities.
- Deaf children may tire more quickly than their hearing peers as they must work hard at listening. Therefore, timetable activities that need the most concentration early in the session and provide opportunities for frequent breaks during listening tasks.
- Ensure that educational apps and video clips are accessible to deaf children. Whenever possible use games that have a strong visual element and clips that have been subtitled or signed. Stopping clips at various points will allow staff to provide additional explanation or check understanding.
- Consider the use of photo diaries to support communication between the setting and home. These will also help the deaf child to recall learning and further practise and extend language used.

Social and emotional development

Difficulties with incidental learning means that deaf children often have difficulty learning social skills and picking up on social rules. Added to this, many opportunities to socialise take place in noisy areas where deaf children are more likely to mishear. You can help by: -

- Facilitating effective communication between the deaf child and their peers
- Explaining to other children what difficulties the deaf child faces and what they can do to help them feel included
- Teaching and modelling appropriate behaviours

Links to additional information

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/supporting-the-achievement-of-hearing-impaired-children-in-early-years-settings/>

