

# Supporting Communication:

## children who are deaf/experiencing hearing loss

### Gain the child's attention

If a child has difficulty hearing they may not be aware that you are speaking to them. To help:

- Make an extra effort to gain the child's attention
- Be face to face - for a baby spend lots of time looking at their face and talking to them
- Consider singing the child's name to gain their attention
- Use gesture to gain the child's attention
- Ensure the child is looking at your face before you speak
- Take care that no lights are shining on your face when you are speaking
- Reduce screen time for everyone

### Reduce background noise

Background noise makes it even harder to hear what is being said. To help:

- Turn off electrical appliances wherever possible
- Keep doors and windows closed
- Use soft furnishings where possible
- Turn off the TV

### Increase the child's awareness of sounds

Being aware of sounds will help a child to listen to people speaking. To help:

- Draw the child's attention to sounds and label them e.g. birdsong, kettle boiling. As the child progresses support the child to identify what they are hearing themselves
- Use repetitive phrases with the same activity(e.g. ready steady go! one, two, three, whee! Up up up! See you soon!
- Sing the same action songs over and over. Leave gaps for the child to fill as the song becomes more familiar.

### Encourage Communication

Support the child to experience how communication can benefit them. To help:

- Be face to face with the child when communicating
- Use sabotage - hold something back during an activity so the child must let you know they want it
- Offer choices throughout the day
- Try not to pre-empt all the child's desires – can they let you know what they want/need?

### Directly support the child's talking and understanding

Children typically learn language and broaden their vocabulary by overhearing others – children with hearing difficulties miss out on this and need more direct support. To help, you can:

- Respond warmly to all the child's attempts to communicate with you e.g. including their use of gesture/ vocalising/touching
- Read a lot to the child



- With older children play vocabulary games – see our online ‘Vocabulary and Word Finding’ presentation
- Actively teach vocabulary and expect the child to need LOTS of repetition
- Remodel spoken language to the child especially if they use ‘all-purpose’ words e.g. if the child says he’s ‘doing a drink’ you can say ‘yes he’s pouring a drink’
- Comment on what the child is doing/looking at/touching in the moment
- Consider supporting spoken language with key word signing – see our online ‘Signing and Gesture’ presentation. **Ask your therapist/health visitor about local signing courses.**
- Allow the child thinking time before expecting a response
- Rephrase what you have said if the child does not understand
- Provide spoken information in short chunks if the child needs you to
- Repeat what others have said in group situations
- Draw the child’s attention to your mouth

### Be aware of listening fatigue

Be aware that if it is difficult for a child to hear then it is difficult to listen and that this makes children very tired. Allow the child breaks from group activities if needed.

### Support with technology

If the child has hearing technology (e.g. hearing aids or cochlear implants) make sure you know how to check it’s working/maintain it. Teachers of the Deaf and Audiology Services can advise you. Be aware that hearing technology should typically be worn all waking hours – support this.

### Be aware of auditory memory

Be aware that the child is likely to find it more difficult to remember spoken information than their peers. Support the child by providing information in chunks/repeating as required. Support verbal information with visuals where possible.

### Extra Tips for Schools

- Give the child the best seat in the house – ensure they are sitting within 1-2 metres of any adult who is speaking to the group. The adult should stand still and look at the child.
- Ensure there is good lighting but that it is not shining on the speaker’s face
- Check that the child can see your face clearly from where they sit
- If another child speaks in class, repeat what they have said directly to the child
- Don’t assume the child will understand abstract words (e.g. conceptual words such as: in/on/under/wet/dry/hot/cold/many/few) – check their understanding and repeatedly model concepts if the child does not know them
- Don’t assume the child has the same ‘functional vocabulary’ as other children (e.g. the child may not know the names of household objects such as: kettle/wardrobe etc.)
- Expect the child to need lots of repetition and direct teaching of new vocabulary
- Expect to support the child with peer interactions - managing and keeping friends can be very hard when you miss bits of conversation
- Expect the child to have difficulties with abstract language (jokes, similes, metaphors etc.)
- Reduce echoes by having soft furnishings and keeping doors/windows closed
- Take an active role in checking the child’s hearing technology is working and that they are using it consistently
- If the child uses an assistive listening device (also known as an FM system or radio aid), ensure it is switched on/off appropriately

<https://www.medwaycommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/speech-and-language-resources>

