

Guiding Your Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child



Highlights

If a child is deaf or hard of hearing, it is important to ensure they receive the right support as early as possible to help them reach their full potential. Early interventions may include specialist assessments for a hearing device, learning to use signs and expressions to communicate, and creating an environment that supports listening.

Helping a child communicate may involve teaching them sign language.

Advocating for a child can help ensure they receive the necessary support.

Connecting with other parents of deaf or hard of hearing children can provide support and valuable insights.

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What do 'deaf' and 'hard of hearing' mean?

When discussing hearing loss, different terms may be used:

'deaf' \ (with a small d\) refers to the physical condition of not hearing.

'Deaf' \ (with a capital D\) describes individuals who use sign language to communicate and identify as members of the Deaf community.

'Hard of hearing' is used for those who developed hearing loss later in life or have mild to moderate hearing loss. Some prefer the term 'hearing impaired.'

Why might a child be deaf or hard of hearing?

Hearing loss in infants and children can be present from birth due to genetic factors or complications during pregnancy. It can also develop later due to infections or injuries. In some cases, the cause is unknown.

Regardless of the cause, healthcare professionals can provide guidance on how to best support a child with hearing loss.

How will I know if my child is deaf or hard of hearing?

Hearing screenings are typically performed in the newborn stage to detect possible hearing issues. If a screening suggests a potential hearing problem, further testing is recommended.

Some hearing issues may not be detected at birth or may develop later. If there are concerns about a child's hearing or speech development, consulting a doctor for a hearing test is advisable.

How can I support my deaf or hard of hearing child?

Early Intervention

Early intervention involves starting support measures as soon as possible to aid a child's development in communication, language, and social skills. This helps them participate in daily life, education, and future employment.

A child's early intervention team may include specialists such as doctors,

speech therapists, audiologists, social workers, and teachers.

Possible interventions include:

- Assessing the need for a hearing device
- Teaching facial expressions and gestures for communication
- Recognizing the child's communication cues
- Improving the home listening environment
- Introducing sign language
- Supporting parental confidence
- Monitoring progress over time

Sign Language

Sign language is a structured way for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to communicate. It has its own grammar and linguistic rules. Learning sign language can help a child communicate more effectively.

Parents can help their child by:

- Introducing sign language at an early age
- Using sign language resources, such as books and online materials
- Incorporating sign language into daily life
- Encouraging family members to learn sign language

Listening Devices

Different types of listening devices are available, depending on the level of hearing loss. These include hearing aids, which amplify sounds, and cochlear implants, which send sound signals directly to the hearing nerve.

A healthcare team can recommend the most suitable device for each child.

Advocacy for a Child

Parents may need to advocate to ensure their child receives the right support. As a child grows, they can also be taught to advocate for themselves.

Raising awareness among others can help create a more supportive environment. For example, providing information to teachers or sports coaches can ensure the child is included in activities.

Planning for School

There are several schooling options for deaf and hard of hearing children, and visiting schools and meeting staff can help in making an informed choice.

Options may include:

Mainstream schools

Mainstream schools with specialist support

Specialist schools for deaf and hard of hearing children

Choosing the right school involves considering where the child feels supported and included. Helping a child prepare for school by discussing expectations and exploring activities can boost their confidence.

Community and Social Connections

It is important for children to feel part of a broader community. They may benefit from making friends with other deaf or hard of hearing children and engaging in social activities.

What support might I need as a parent?

Learning that a child is deaf or hard of hearing can feel overwhelming. Connecting with other parents in similar situations can be valuable for emotional support and practical advice.

Tools and Assistance

Various organizations provide mentorship, support groups, and information for families of deaf or hard of hearing children. Exploring available resources can help parents navigate challenges and find the best support for their child.