

Deaf children who become looked after

**A guide for
care workers**



Our vision is of
a world without
barriers for
every deaf child

Introduction

Who is this booklet for?

This guide has been written to help children's residential carers and key-workers support looked after deaf children in those first few hours and days following a placement.

It will give you a brief overview of all the things that you will need to know, and will show you where to find advice when you need it.

Read each topic and if you have any questions, either you or the child's social worker can contact the NDCS Freephone Helpline on **0808 800 8880**, email **helpline@ndcs.org.uk** or take part in a live chat at **www.ndcs.org.uk/livechat**. You can also order our publications through the Helpline.

Others who can help

The child's social worker should be able to support you in finding further information on issues related to childhood deafness. If they don't have the specialist knowledge, they should put you in touch with the local Children with Disabilities or Sensory team who will be able to advise you.

Is the child in my care 'deaf'?

NDCS uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all levels of hearing loss in children, including a partial or total loss of hearing. This includes those who may describe themselves as having a 'hearing loss', 'hearing impairment' or as 'deaf', and includes children who have glue ear. It refers to those who use hearing aids or cochlear implants, and to those who don't.

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*"If you're not sure
about something,
ask the young
person!"
Deaf Young Person*

Communication

Every deaf child is different and their deafness can range from mild to profound. The child's deafness may be described as mild, moderate, severe or profound.

Some deaf children may **sign** (for example using **British Sign Language** or **Makaton**) and some may **lipread**. Depending on their level of hearing loss some **may be able to listen** and some may **speak. Some may do all these things.**

You will soon learn the exact communication needs of the child in your care and then you can take steps to make communication easier straight away.



*"If you don't know
sign don't worry!
There are plenty
of other ways to
communicate."
Deaf Young Person*

Communication

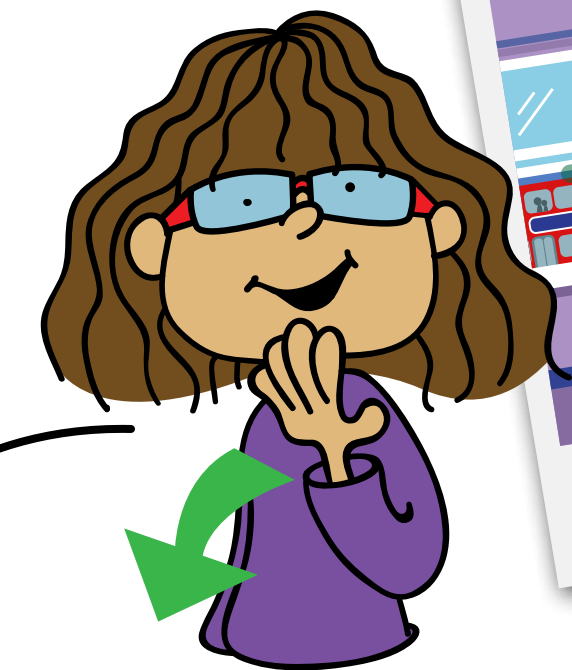
Do's

- Speak clearly and normally.
- Use visual cues where possible – point to what you're talking about or draw a picture.
- Display photos of the people who live and work in your household, labelled with their names – this is a great way for a deaf child to learn who is who in your household.
- Use subtitles on TV.
- Reduce background noise to help a child to hear, e.g. turn your TV off if it's not being used.
- Ensure the lighting is good to help the child lipread.
- Talk one at a time when in a group, e.g. at mealtimes. This will give the deaf child the chance to identify who is talking, so they don't miss out on the conversation. Mealtimes can be a challenge for deaf children, but are important places for them to socialise and to know when second helpings are being offered.
- Use weekly planners. These are good visual timetables to help with setting up routines. Order one free from our website **www.ndcs.org.uk** → Family Support → Positive parenting & families → Parenting resources, or call the Freephone Helpline.
- Show a deaf child where any unusual loud noises may occur in your house, e.g. a loud washing machine.
- Ask the child to repeat what you've said to check they've understood.

Thank you

Don'ts

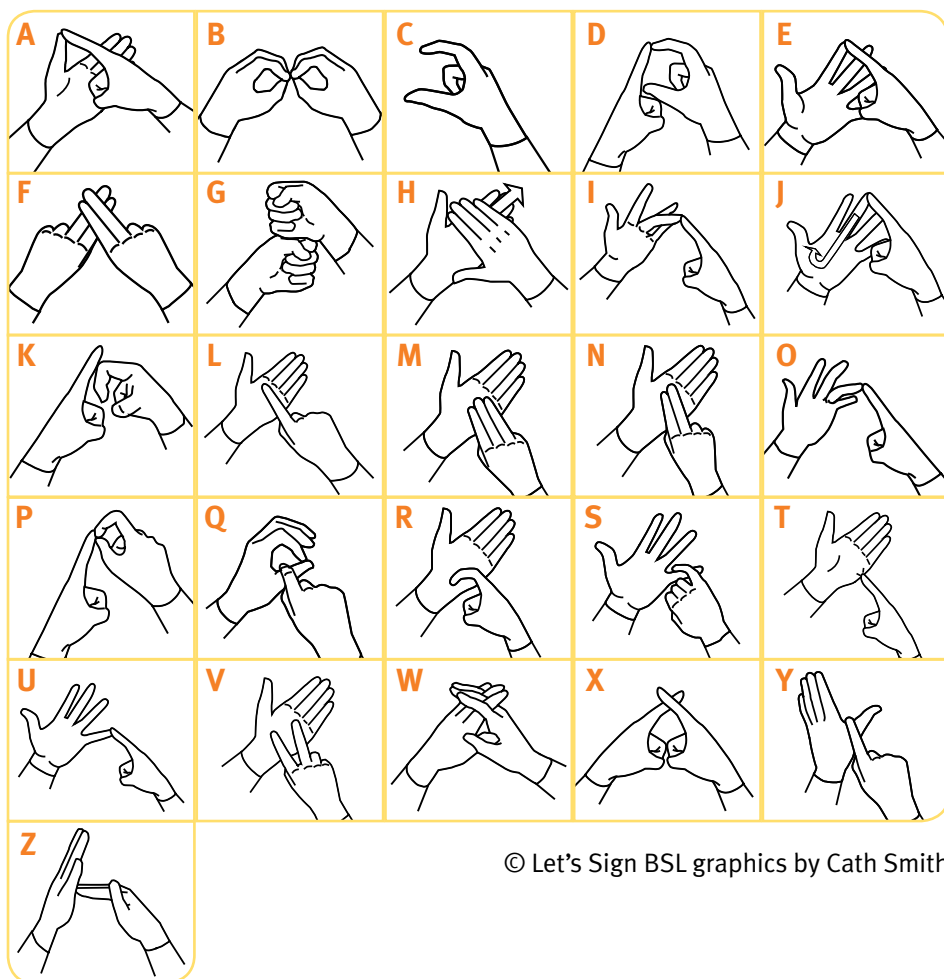
- Stand in front of very bright lights. If you are speaking where sunlight is shining behind you a deaf child will not be able to lipread you.
- Cover or put anything in your mouth when speaking.
- Shout or slow down speech.
- Give up. If you get stuck, try explaining in a different way or writing it down. You could use your mobile phone.



Communication

Fingerspelling alphabet

Many deaf children will use fingerspelling to back up some spoken words by fingerspelling the first letter of names of people or places. We have included a fingerspelling alphabet to help you. Learn the first letter of your own name or key family members and use them when you speak to the child.



© Let's Sign BSL graphics by Cath Smith

British Sign Language (BSL)

British Sign Language is a visual language using handshapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to communicate. It is an independent, complete language with a unique vocabulary and the grammatical structure of BSL is different from that of written or spoken English.

Family Sign Language

NDCS has developed a Family Sign Language website featuring real-life video footage of families using simple signs with their children as well as a dictionary function that shows you how to do more than 300 signs. Family sign language is suitable for use with children aged under five and teaches everyday signs that you can use during stories, nursery rhymes and play. It's free to access.

Visit **www.familysignlanguage.org.uk**.

See the NDCS publication *Communicating with your Deaf Child* for more information.



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your questions on
0808 800 8880

Hearing aid technology

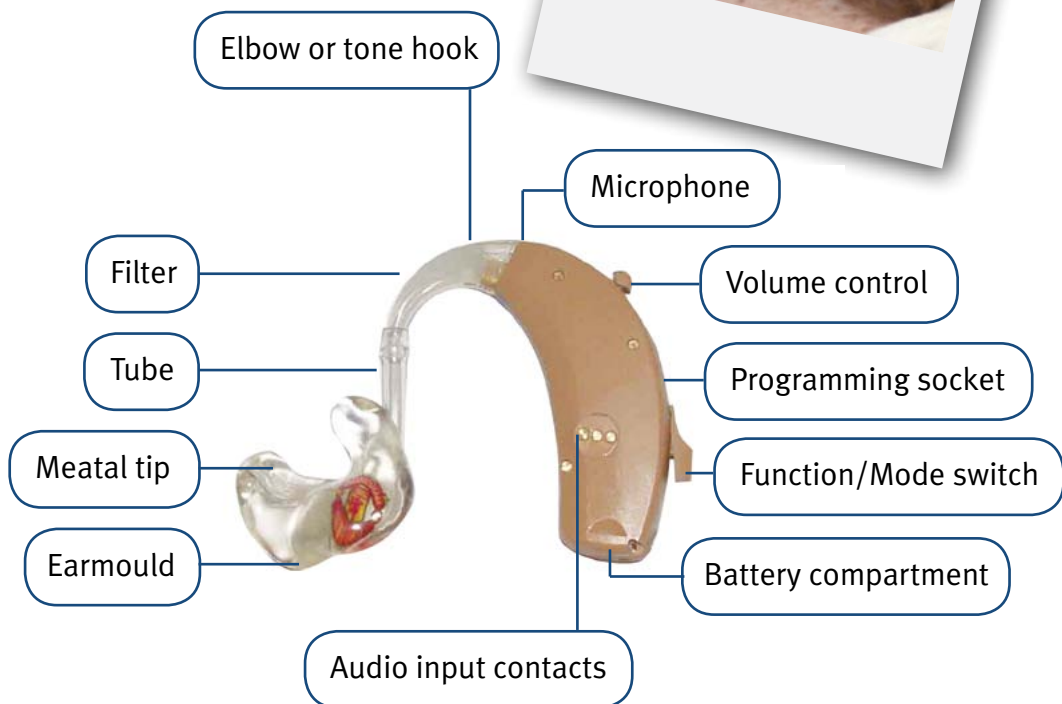
There are various types of technology that can help deaf children to hear.

The three most common ones are:

Behind-the-ear hearing aid

This is the most common model, but the child's aid may look slightly different.

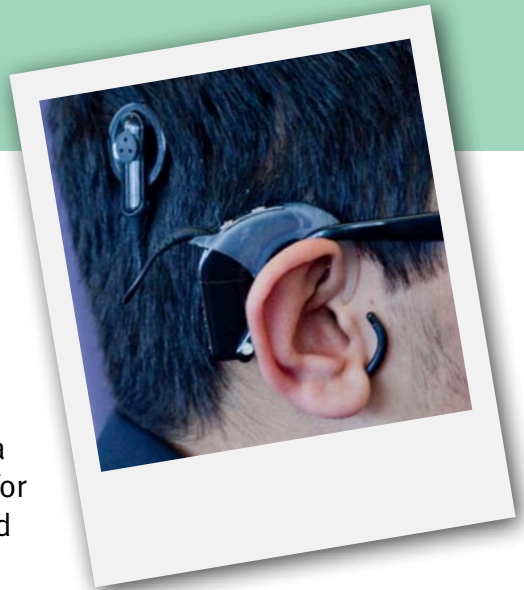
See the NDCS publication *Hearing Aids – Information for families* for more information.



Cochlear implant

This is a special type of hearing device which is fitted during an operation. Cochlear implants have two parts – an internal receiver which is implanted surgically and an external part which is worn like a hearing aid. Cochlear implants are for children and adults who gain limited or no benefit from hearing aids.

See the NDCS publication *Cochlear Implants – A guide for families* for more information.



Bone-anchored hearing aid

This type of hearing aid is fitted during an operation and clips on to a titanium screw implanted into the skull-bone behind the ear.

See the NDCS publication *Bone Anchored Hearing Aids – Information for families* for more information.



Hearing aid technology

FAQs

How do I care for the deaf child's hearing aids? I don't know how to change the batteries, change the tubing or clean them.

Both hearing aids and cochlear implants require batteries.

Cochlear implant processors are often powered by a rechargeable unit. Rechargeable batteries will need charging on a daily basis.

Behind-the-ear hearing aids require small C-size batteries which are provided free from your hospital's audiology department. These batteries will need to be changed regularly, at least once a week.

The hearing aid earmould can be cleaned thoroughly using soap and water.

Watch our videos on caring for hearing aids, *How to Look After your Deaf Child's Hearing Aids* and *How to Change the Tubing in your Deaf Child's Hearing Aids* on the NDCS YouTube channel at **www.youtube.com/ndcswebteam**.

Can the child wear their hearing aid at night?

If the child uses hearing aid technology, they may not like the quiet when it's taken out at night. It's not ideal for a child to sleep with their hearing aid in/implant on, but for the first few nights it will not harm the equipment if it helps them to settle and get used to their new surroundings. Be aware that babies and very young children should not be left unattended with hearing aids as they could be a choke hazard.

Can the child wear hearing aids in the bath or for swimming?

No, don't get them wet as this will damage them – make sure they are taken out of the child's ear when swimming or having a bath. Although many hearing aids are now described as water resistant you should never immerse them in water.

The hearing aids are making a high pitched sound, is there something wrong?

This is called feedback. Check there is nothing pressing on the hearing aid/implant, for example if you are holding a young child/baby to feed. Encourage the child to move in case there is another sound source interfering with their aids, for example a radio. If this doesn't solve the problem it may be that new earmoulds are required or the child has a wax build-up.

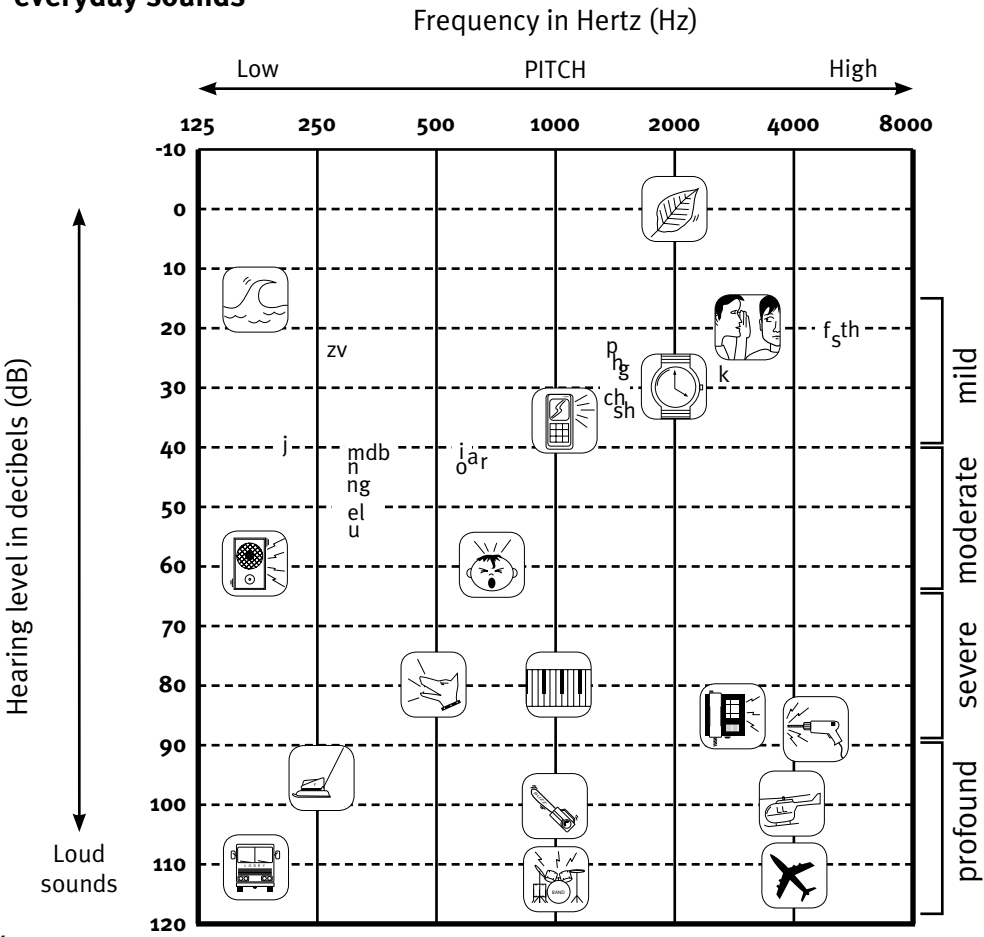
Check out our video from our audiologist, *How to Manage the Whistling in your Child's Hearing Aids* on the NDCS YouTube channel at **www.youtube.com/ndcswebteam**.

For more information on how to care for your deaf child's hearing aids please read *Hearing Aids – Information for families*. This publication also contains the step-by-step instructions that are in our videos.

Sounds and how we hear them

Below is a very useful diagram that shows you the level (decibel) and pitch (frequency) of various sounds. You can use it to understand the child's audiogram and what sounds they are able to hear. An audiogram is a chart on which a child's hearing test results are written. It shows how loud a sound has to be, and at what frequency, before the child can hear it.

Visual representation of the loudness and pitch of a range of everyday sounds



Useful equipment

For more information on the ear and hearing, and hearing tests read the NDCS booklet *Understanding your Child's Hearing Tests*.

A wide range of useful equipment, such as vibrating smoke alarms and alarm clocks, are available to deaf children, some of it through children's social care. You can ask the child's social worker about equipment available in your area. Equipment that the child needs for their education may be provided by your local authority. The NDCS publication *How Technology Can Help* will give you guidance about the range of equipment that is available. It also tells you how you can get the equipment the deaf child needs.

An orange oval button with a slight shadow, containing white text that reads: "Call NDCS with your questions on 0808 800 8880".

Call NDCS with
your questions on
0808 800 8880

Myth busters

Here are some facts that may challenge your current beliefs or answer some of the questions you may have about deafness.

All deaf children use sign language. FALSE.

Yes, some deaf children do use sign language, but remember there are lots of ways to communicate. Every deaf child is different and will want to communicate in the way that works best for them. Just ask them!

All deaf children can lipread. FALSE.

Becoming an expert lipreader takes a lot of concentration and effort that can tire children. Only about 30% of lip patterns are recognisable, and a lot of it is guesswork.

Deaf children cannot enjoy music. FALSE.

There are lots of deaf children who love music. Some can hear the music very well with help, others may not hear the music fully but enjoy the vibrations. There is technology available to help the child in your care to better access music, like Bluetooth devices (these use wireless communication technology and can be used with hearing aids and cochlear implants) and having lyrics added to iPods (see *How Technology Can Help*).

Deaf children don't watch TV because they can't hear it. FALSE.

Deaf children enjoy TV just as much as hearing children. Some like to use subtitles or radio aids. A radio aid consists of a transmitter (used by the person who is talking) and a receiver (used by the deaf child). A microphone picks up the speaker's voice and the sounds are then transmitted by radio waves to the receiver (see *How Technology Can Help*).

Deaf children can hear everything with their hearing aids in or cochlear implants on. FALSE.

Hearing aids can help focus sound and make it louder, and cochlear implants carry sound directly to the brain. These devices are very helpful for some deaf children, but it doesn't mean they can hear in the same way as a hearing child. Remember that a deaf child still needs your help in communicating clearly and effectively.

Deaf children can't use the phone. FALSE.

Lots of deaf children can talk on the phone. Special amplified phones are available to help them, or others use text messages, textphones and other devices (see *How Technology Can Help*).

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Further information

NDCS has many free publications on topics related to childhood deafness at **www.ndcs.org.uk**.

Membership of NDCS is **FREE** to professionals and gives you a subscription to *Families* magazine, support services and free downloads of our information resources.

Visit our website **www.ndcs.org.uk** for information on a range of topics which have been informed by parents, professionals and deaf children and young people.

- Childhood deafness – causes, audiology and hearing technology.
- Deaf children with additional and complex needs.
- Communication – how to make your home deaf friendly, top communication tips and deaf awareness.
- Glue Ear – a common childhood illness which can cause temporary deafness.
- Education – supporting the child at school.
- Accessing leisure activities such as swimming or youth clubs.
- Technology – how technology can help the child in a range of settings such as at home, school or at the cinema.
- Local deaf children's groups in your area.
- Events for deaf children and their families, such as Family Weekends.
- An online forum – Parent Place – for parents and carers to chat and share their experiences at **www.ndcs.org.uk/parentplace**.
- Visit the official NDCS YouTube channel to watch our videos at **www.youtube.com/ndcswebteam**.

Our website for deaf children & young people

The Buzz gives deaf children and young people the opportunity to make new friends, check out the latest information on all sorts of subjects, find events in their area, play games and chat about the things that matter to them. The site is closely monitored and we have a clear online safety policy to help deaf young people stay safe when using the website.



Our Freephone Helpline

We're just a phone call away,
on **0808 800 8880**
(voice and text) if you need
information and support.

You can also contact us by
emailing **helpline@ndcs.org.uk**
or use our live chat service at
www.ndcs.org.uk/livechat.

Opening hours:
Monday to Thursday
9.30am–9.30pm
Friday 9.30am–5pm

NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

**NDCS Freephone Helpline:
0808 800 8880 (voice and text)**

Email: helpline@ndcs.org.uk

www.ndcs.org.uk

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