

# Hearing loss: Communication.

NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell



## Introduction

Hearing loss is a varied and complex disability and each deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) individual experiences their disability in an individual way. The inability to communicate with confidence and ease can affect every aspect of human experience, from making friends and forming relationships, to being educated and finding work. It is difficult to function in the 'hearing world' where the environment is designed for sound. However, not all DHH people are totally deaf; in fact, only a small proportion live in total silence.

## Discussion

Most DHH people communicate visually and physically, using their hands, faces and bodies to get the message across in the most effective ways possible (Scott & Dostal,

2019). Being aware of communication techniques used by DHH people is the first step in removing communication barriers.

Some DHH people can distinguish sound but cannot understand speech. People with mild hearing loss might not be able to hear sounds but might not understand speech, especially high-pitched and soft frequency sounds like f, th, or s (in English). As the level of hearing loss increases, so does the inability to hear certain sounds, and some method of amplification becomes necessary (Bell, 2013).

Sign language and the oral approach are the two main means of communication for DHH persons. Sign Language is a complete, natural language that has the same linguistic properties as spoken languages, but with a grammar of its own. It is a combination of hand signs, facial expressions and finger spelling (Scott & Dostal, 2019). People who associate themselves with Deaf culture regard Sign Language to be their first language (Bell, 2013). However, there is no universal sign language, as different sign languages are used in different countries or regions, or even schools.

The oral approach to communication uses residual hearing, relies on a DHH person's ability to speak and can be enhanced with hearing aids. Sign language is not used and lipreading is emphasised. These two approaches might seem to be completely opposed to each other, but both have strengths and weaknesses.

Total Communication (TC) is a philosophy of education aimed at DHH learners. TC uses a combination of methods that include formal signs, natural gestures, fingerspelling, body language, hearing aids or cochlear implants,

listening, lipreading and speech. The goal is to optimise communication among DHH and hearing people (WHO 2021). However, when they communicate with hearing people, DHH people often do not get all the information, making it impossible for them understand the whole conversation. In addition, the use of body language can be problematic as it is often based on cultural norms and can lead to misunderstanding.

## Conclusion

It is necessary to consider how attitudes and stereotyping Communication by means of any language is not as easy as people often think it is. Language can be a way of connecting people, but it can also be a barrier. Awareness of and information about people who use a different language are the first steps towards removing barriers between hearing persons in the so-called hearing world and persons with hearing loss.

## References

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