

# Disability: The importance of early language acquisition.

NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell



## Introduction

Communication is important for making contact, reaching out to others, satisfying our needs, revealing feelings, sharing information and accomplishing so many things; language is a type of code used to represent these concepts. Most children are born into a world in which they receive large amounts of language input, thus the acquisition of language begins at birth, and even before (Hall, Hall & Caselli, 2019). Through language, hearing children learn to make sense of nearly all aspects and stages of development because they learn language first, and later learn to use the language to learn.

## Discussion

Children who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) enter a 'hearing world' where their access to language is not

guaranteed. A child who cannot hear the speech of other people from birth or soon after birth cannot learn speech and language spontaneously, and have few opportunities to learn from sounds in their environment (Scott & Dostal, 2019). Marschark and Hauser (2008) found that without speech and hearing, delay in language acquisition occurs, and this influences memory, problem-solving, and academic achievement.

For DHH children, the mismatch between the child's perceptual abilities and the family language environment often results in a lack of easily accessible language input for the child. This, in turn, measurably impairs children's acquisition of – and proficiency in – whatever language(s) they are exposed to, with subsequent adverse consequences in other developmental domains that depend on language (e.g., cognition, social-emotional

skills, school readiness, and academic outcomes).

This overall experience of lacking fully accessible language input is increasingly described as language deprivation (Hall et al., 2019). When hearing children demonstrate slow or incomplete proficiency of a first language (which can be sign language), it is usually because of a language disorder. In contrast, DHH children who lack proficiency in a first language have often not received sufficient language input.

## Conclusion

Increasing access to linguistic input is very important for DHH children. There is universal agreement that fully accessible language experiences during early childhood are the key to empowering DHH children's development potential.

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## References

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