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## Information for parents and caregivers



# Communication support for pre-school children who are deaf or hard of hearing

This information sheet is for the parents and caregivers of pre-school children who are deaf or hard of hearing. It outlines the government-funded support you can get from the Ministry of Education and other providers in the education sector.

It focuses on the communication approaches to consider – it's our job to explain to you these approaches and to support you to think about and decide what's best for you and your child.

Communication is important to everyone. It's central to a child's ability to bond with you and other members of your family and whānau. We all need communication to develop and learn.

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing, with the right support, may learn to communicate in different ways.

If a child has a hearing aid, cochlear implant or other hearing devices, they may develop listening and spoken language through listening and talking, natural gestures and lip reading.

Alternatively, they can learn to use a combination of spoken language and New Zealand Sign Language (known as NZSL) – combining NZSL

with spoken language or using it as their main method of communication.

The key thing for you, as parents and caregivers, is to get a good understanding of all the approaches available to you before working out what comes next.

That's where we can help.



## Ministry support

We are here to:

- ▶ provide you with information about the different communication approaches and what is involved with supporting your child to learn and develop communication skills at home and in the community
- ▶ connect you with professionals who can meet you face-to-face to answer your questions and give you more information about the approaches
- ▶ put you in touch with other parents and caregivers who are thinking about the same things and going through a similar experience
- ▶ put you in touch with the Deaf community to learn more about NZSL and Deaf culture
- ▶ provide general support and encouragement.

Once you've made a decision on the communication approach you want to take, our Advisers on Deaf Children will help you and your child get started.

They will also help you review your child's progress to make sure everything is on track. If things aren't quite right, it's fine to change your mind and try a different approach.

## What are the main communication approaches?

There are four main communication approaches.

1. Developing spoken language through listening, speaking and gesture.
2. Developing spoken language through listening (also called Auditory-Verbal approach).
3. Developing spoken language and NZSL through listening, talking and using sign language (also called Bimodal Bilingual communication).
4. Communication through NZSL as the primary language.

Each communication approach is described below in more detail. Remember, you can discuss your ideas, thoughts and concerns with a Ministry of Education Adviser on Deaf Children at any stage.

### Developing spoken language through listening, speaking and gesture

#### What is it?

This approach focuses on the development of a child's language skills by teaching them to listen, talk and use visual strategies like lip reading and natural gestures.

#### Who does it suit?

Any child who is deaf or hard of hearing, including children fitted with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Parents and caregivers keen on supporting their child to develop spoken language in the home as part of the daily routine.

#### Who will I work with?

A Ministry of Education specialist called an Adviser on Deaf Children.

#### What's involved?

Typically, your Adviser on Deaf Children will meet with you soon after your child is identified with hearing loss. They will work with you to model language to your child as you go about your daily routine. They will provide guidance and advice on language development and help you track your child's language development over time. With this approach, parents and caregivers set the pace and frequency of meetings. You also decide when and where to meet – either at home or somewhere else in the community that suits you.

#### How do I get started?

Start by talking to an Adviser on Deaf Children from the Ministry of Education.

### Developing spoken language through listening (called Auditory-Verbal approach)

#### What is it?

This approach focuses on the development of a child's spoken language skills through listening.

#### Who does it suit?

Any child who is deaf or hard of hearing fitted with hearing aids, cochlear implants and other listening devices. Parents and caregivers keen on supporting their



child to develop spoken language with support from specialists who use an Auditory-Verbal approach.

#### **Who will I work with?**

Auditory-Verbal Therapists from The Hearing House, the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme and Northern Cochlear Implant Programme, as well as Advisers on Deaf Children.

#### **What's involved?**

Working with Auditory-Verbal Therapists and Advisers on Deaf Children from the time your child is identified with a hearing loss. Auditory-Verbal Therapists will work with you to develop your child's listening and spoken language skills and provide guidance and advice on language development. At times, you may work together in a specialist clinic or using technology like Skype to communicate to each other from home.

#### **How do I get started?**

Talk to an Adviser on Deaf Children from the Ministry of Education or an audiologist.

### **Developing spoken language and NZSL through listening, talking and sign language (also called bimodal bilingual communication)**

#### **What is it?**

This approach focuses on learning to communicate using a range of skills, including spoken language and sign language.

#### **Who does it suit?**

Any child who is deaf or hard of hearing, including children fitted with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Parents and caregivers keen on learning sign language to support their child to develop

spoken language at home and within the community, with support from an NZSL facilitator.

#### **Who will I work with?**

NZSL facilitators (called First Signs facilitators) employed by Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as Advisers on Deaf Children.

#### **What's involved?**

Regular meetings with a First Signs facilitator and Adviser on Deaf Children. The First Signs facilitator will work with you to develop NZSL and help you support your child to use NZSL. The Adviser on Deaf Children will help you to develop spoken language and listening skills with your child. First Signs facilitators are there to support parents and caregivers from the time their child is born and identified with a hearing loss through to the time their child starts school. With this approach, you set the pace and frequency of your First Signs meetings and you decide when and where to meet – either at home or somewhere else in the community that suits you.

#### **How do I get started?**

Talk to an Adviser on Deaf Children at the Ministry of Education or contact Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **Communicating through NZSL as the primary language**

#### **What is it?**

This approach focuses on the development of a child's language skills by teaching them NZSL as their primary language.

#### **Who does it suit?**

Any child who is deaf or hard of hearing, including children fitted with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Parents and caregivers

keen on learning and using NZSL and passing on that knowledge to their children and family members.

#### **Who will I work with?**

NZSL facilitator (called a First Signs facilitator) employed by Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as an Adviser on Deaf Children.

#### **What's involved?**

Regular meetings with a First Signs facilitator and an Adviser on Deaf Children. The First Signs facilitator will teach you NZSL and help you support your child to learn and use NZSL as your child's primary means of communicating. Specialist support is available from the time your child is identified with a hearing loss through to the time your child starts school. With this approach, you set the pace and frequency of the meetings and also decide when and where to meet – either at home or somewhere else in the community that suits you.

#### **How do I get started?**

Talk to an Adviser on Deaf Children from the Ministry of Education or contact Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **What happens after making a decision?**

After you've made your decision, you can get started. The sooner you help your child to communicate and learn to communicate – the better.

Remember, whatever you decide, we recommend reviewing your child's progress at least every six months to make sure everything is on track.

If things aren't quite right, you can always talk to us or try something else. It's fine to change your mind and try different approaches.

## People and organisations who might work with you and your child

### **Advisers on Deaf Children:**

Ministry of Education specialists who support children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

### **Auditory-Verbal Therapists:**

Therapists based at The Hearing House and the Northern and Southern Cochlear Implant Programmes to support children to develop spoken language through listening.

### **Early Intervention Teachers:**

Specialists employed by the Ministry of Education and Kelston Deaf Education Centre and van Asch Deaf Education Centre (in their pre-school programmes) to support children with early learning and language needs.

### **First Signs facilitators:**

People skilled in NZSL and employed by Deaf Aotearoa to help family and whānau learn and teach NZSL to children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

### **Resource Teachers of the Deaf:**

Employed by Kelston Deaf Education Centre and van Asch Deaf Education Centre to support the learning and development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Kelston Deaf Education Centre and van Asch Deaf Education Centre may provide support for children 3 to 5 years of age depending on their overall needs, through their Regional Service.

### **Speech Language Therapists:**

Specialists employed by the Ministry of Education to support children who may have difficulties talking, listening, understanding and using language.

## Contact us

If you're unclear about the communication support available or have questions about the support your child receives, please ask.

Start by talking to the people who work closely with your child – audiologists can give you information about Advisers on Deaf Children and provide you with a range of Ministry of Education resources on hearing loss.

You can also talk with staff at your local Ministry of Education office or call the Special Education information line on 0800 622 222.

You can get more detailed special education information on our parent portal:  
[www.parents.education.govt.nz](http://www.parents.education.govt.nz)

If you're deaf or hard of hearing, you can also contact Ministry of Education through the New Zealand Relay Service on 0800 4711 711 or go to [www.nzrelay.co.nz](http://www.nzrelay.co.nz)

Your feedback is important. By letting us know what's going well – and what we can do better – we can improve what we do to support all children with special education needs.

### Contact details for the people in my child's communication team:

My local Ministry of Education office: