

Deaf- ness

*A Guide for
Parents,
Teachers and
Community Workers*



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Introduction

All over the world there are deaf people. International statistics estimate that some 2.5% of the world population has some degree of deafness. Some of these people are born deaf, and some become deaf as a result of childhood illnesses, accidents or other traumas. Some children are deaf because there is an inherited type of deafness in their family, but these make up a very small number of the total of deaf people in the world.

There are also many people who begin to lose their hearing as they become old. This manual does not talk about old-age deafness.

Some of the results of being deaf

We use our hearing to locate the source of sound and to find out what it is telling us. The world is full of sounds of all kinds, some pleasant and some unpleasant. We learn to listen to some sounds and to cut out others. For example, if a tractor is at work every day near our house we stop listening to the sound it makes because we know what that sound is, and that it has no special message for us; but if we hear a bicycle bell we jump out of the way.

Some deaf people can hear some sounds and not others. Some deaf people cannot hear any sounds at all. All deaf people are different.

The most important sounds we hear are the sounds of speech. We use speech

to communicate with other people. (We listen to our own speech, too, so that we are not talking too loudly or too quietly.) Deaf people often have difficulty in communicating with other people, especially with people who can hear.

People who go deaf after they have learned to talk feel very cut off when they have this difficulty of communicating with other people. Sometimes a hearing aid may help them to hear other people better, but this depends on their level of deafness. (See Programme 3.)

Children who are deaf

Deafness in children does not only make it difficult for them to communicate with other people; it also slows down, or even prevents altogether, their learning.

A great deal of what children learn comes from what they (over) hear. They hear their family members talking and they learn. They hear people in the community talking and they learn. They hear other children talking and they learn. They hear the radio or television and they learn. All this is in addition to what is said *to* them.

Children who are deaf miss out on all this learning. Even children who are only a little bit deaf miss out; children who are very deaf miss out nearly everything. So they need very special help in order to learn. (See Programme 2.)

This special help will come from schooling; but parents, siblings, family

members and the community are all needed to help as well.

It is important that this special help starts as early as possible, so diagnosis is important. (See Programme 3.)

Children who lose their hearing after they have learned to talk, and have been talking long enough to develop their spoken language, need special help to continue their schooling, to continue to develop their language and to preserve their speech.

If they have some hearing left a hearing aid, if available, *may* help. There are many problems with hearing aids (see Programme 3). Sign language will also be needed. (see Programme 1.)

Children who are born deaf, or lose their hearing before their spoken language is developed, are most likely to be helped by sign language. Lip-reading is also useful but is very difficult. (See Programme 2.)

Sign languages

Sign languages are languages that do not have words. They are produced by using positions and movements of the hands, face and body. They depend on space and position in space. (See Programme 2). They are real languages, can be used to express everything that spoken languages express, and have their own grammar. They have to be learned like any other language.

Hearing children learn by listening to the language spoken around them. Deaf children need to see sign language used around them in order to learn. They find it as easy to learn to use sign language as hearing children find it to talk.

The best people for the deaf children to learn from are adult deaf people who themselves use sign language. Parents, family members, the community and teachers can all learn sign language from adult deaf people.

Teachers need to learn sign language

properly, and know it well, if they are to teach deaf children. But if they have deaf children to teach before they have an opportunity to learn sign language well, they can help the children by learning some signs and using them when they talk. This is *not* sign language and should be replaced by sign language as soon as possible. Deaf adults may come in and help with the deaf children.

Deaf children also need to learn to read and write the language that is spoken in the community, just as hearing children learn to read and write. They will need special help to do this. They can learn all these, and all other school subjects too, with the help of sign language.

More about sign languages

Every country has its own sign language just as every country has its own spoken languages. Some of these have dictionaries and other teaching materials. Just as a spoken language may differ a little from place to place inside one country, so a sign language may differ a little from place to place. But it will be fairly standardized and easily understood by all who use it.

Not all deaf people use sign language, but the majority do. (Many deaf people know more than one sign language just as many hearing people know more than one spoken language.) Deaf people who use sign language think of themselves as a distinct community.

Because language influences culture, this community has a distinct culture. Deaf children need to know and share this culture as well as the culture of their home and community.

The capital letter “D” is usually used to describe the people who belong to the community of sign-language users. They are Deaf people.

Sign languages can be used exactly like spoken languages, to communicate anything (and everything).

Deaf children need to meet each other and to communicate with each other. Sometimes there is more than one deaf child in a family or community, which is good. But sometimes children need to go to school to meet other deaf children. (See Programme 2.)

More about deaf culture

The Deaf community very much enjoys shared activities and has, where possible, special clubs, gatherings and events, with as many opportunities for socializing as possible. Many of these clubs and events have strong competent deaf leadership.

Deaf people pass on the community culture by story telling, traditions and legends.

Deaf people consider the nurture of deaf children, the sharing with them of the culture, and helping them to learn and develop sign language, very important.

The deaf community has its own rules of polite behaviour, social behaviour, and communication behaviour. These all depend on visual signals.

Achievement

If deaf children receive a good and suitable education then they are every bit as capable as hearing people. There is the same range of ability.

They can be academically successful — doctors, lawyers, lecturers. They can do many jobs — printers, carpenters,

farmers, dressmakers. They can and do marry and bring up children. They can learn and understand the appropriate religious faith. They can be responsible citizens and know what is right and what is wrong. But these things only happen if they are given opportunities.

While not every deaf person uses sign language, it is fairly generally accepted by the majority that these opportunities are greatly increased by the use of sign language. This sign language needs to be known as well, and used as well, as any spoken language.

The only thing deaf people cannot do is hear

In the video that accompany this manual you will see interviews with deaf people in Africa. Deaf people discuss the importance of early identification and intervention for deaf children. Parents of deaf children talk about the value of learning sign language. Deaf people talk about schooling and the importance of sign language. They talk about the deaf community and culture. You will learn about deaf organizations, local, national and international. Some prominent deaf leaders explain how they have succeeded in the world.

Some books you might find helpful to read are mentioned in this manual, and at the end you can find addresses or organizations that you can contact to get more information and help.

Programme 1

Sign language

Signed languages are the natural languages of deaf people. They are the languages deaf people use when they communicate with one another.

Some questions for you to consider, or discuss with the other people in your group:

1. What do you think happens if deaf people *talk* to each other (without using sign language)?
2. Some deaf people do learn to talk as well as sign. They usually sound different from hearing people. Why do you think this happens?
3. How do you think deaf children learn sign language?

Wherever there are deaf people there are sign languages and the best way for deaf children to learn them is to pick these languages up naturally, through exposure, in just the same way as hearing children learn spoken languages. Then they can use them to do everything that hearing children do with their spoken language.

Linguists and psychologists have studied signed languages and have found that they are equal to spoken languages in every way.

Helpful reading: *Poisner, H., Klima, E., and Bellugi, V.(1987). What the Hands Reveal about the Brain.*

Why is it important for deaf children to learn to sign?

All human beings need to communicate. Communication is difficult without language. People who cannot communicate their needs, desires, thoughts and feelings to other people may be lonely and isolated. They will not become educated, and as a result, may never be able to earn a living, be self-sufficient, or take their place in the community. This is a tragedy and need not happen to children who are deaf. It can be prevented by learning to sign and communicate with others who can sign. The more people around the children who can sign the better for them it will be. Deaf children's brains are not affected by their deafness, they can learn about the world around them and all the school lessons through signed language. They use their eyes to see the language, and their hands, faces and bodies to produce the language.

If they are not able to communicate easily it may affect their psychological health as well as their learning.

When should deaf children learn to sign?

It is important for deaf children to learn to sign as early as possible. Like all children they need affection and care, but communication is very, very important. If there is no one in the family who uses sign language then the deaf child needs other children and adults who are deaf and do

use sign language. The other people in the child's family should also learn to sign as much as possible so that they can communicate with the child.

Where can deaf children learn to sign?

As soon as possible the family should find out where there are organizations or groups of deaf people. They will then help the family and the child to learn sign language.

Remember:

- ▶ the earlier a deaf child learns to sign the more likely that child is to be successful in school and in later life
- ▶ communication is necessary for good psychological health and adjustment
- ▶ the child needs to know what is happening in his family and community

A deaf child playing outside may see some of the children suddenly run towards the river. The children ran because they heard someone shouting about a very big fish. The deaf child may never know why they ran away from the game. The child might think it was her fault!

A house in the community might be pulled down very suddenly. Everyone will have heard people talking about the dangerous roof and know why it has been demolished. The deaf child may never know why it has been pulled down. That child might be afraid that his house could be pulled down suddenly too!

- ▶ the child needs to learn about right and wrong and to understand the family and community rules
- ▶ the child needs friends to play and learn with. Older children's friendships depend almost entirely on communicating together. The younger children need to understand play and game rules and patterns
- ▶ older children need to know what is

happening in the country and in the world

Knowledge depends on communication. Relationships depend on communication. Behaviour depends on communication. Living in society depends on communication.

Can you think of other things that depend on communication?

Children have rights

It is generally recognised throughout the world that children need and have a right to education. Deaf children share that need and right.

The Salamanca Framework for Action (1994) states that:

Education policies should take full account of individual difference and situations. The importance of sign language as a medium of communication among the deaf, for example, should be recognized and provision made to ensure that all deaf persons have access to education in their signed language. Owing to the particular communication needs of deaf and deafblind persons, their education may be more suitably provided in special schools or special classes and units in mainstream schools. (See Programme 2.)

Deaf people have a right to use signed language and deaf children and young people have a right to education by and with sign language.

How do deaf children learn?

All children learn through observation and discovery as well as through direct teaching. They learn through interaction with others and with the environment; through touching, tasting, smelling and exploring. They learn through experimentation, by asking questions and by solving problems. This all starts long before they go to school.

Children need to learn other skills like self-help, self-care, particularly cleanliness. They need to learn co-operation with others and community spirit. Teachers build on what has been, and is being, learned at home or in the community.

Hearing children learn all this through, or accompanied by, spoken language. Deaf children do not hear the spoken language and so miss a lot of the learning, unless sign language is used instead. With sign language they are likely to learn much more about all these things.

How do deaf children learn to read and write?

Reading is one of the most important ways through which everybody, young or old, goes on learning. Reading is important for understanding messages, advertising, laws, notices, instructions and many other things. Reading is a way of sharing the ideas, emotions and experiences of other people. Reading is a difficult skill for deaf children to learn.

No children learn reading unless they are first able to communicate and to use language. Being able to use sign language and to communicate makes it easier for deaf children to learn to read.

Writing is an important way of communicating, of recording facts and ideas, of passing on instructions. This is another difficult thing for deaf children to learn. Sign language may make it easier for them.

The language that the deaf children are learning to read and write is a second language for them.

Helpful reading: *Akach, P. and Mweri, J. (1990). Kenyan Sign Language as a Second Language Curriculum. (Obtainable from the Kenyan National Association of the Deaf.)*

What do teachers of deaf children need to know?

Teachers of deaf children need to know how to teach any children! It is important that they learn sign language and know how to use it in teaching (if they do not yet know sign language they can still start to teach the deaf children but learn sign language as quickly and as well as possible).

Deaf teachers, as long as they know how to teach, are very useful. Other deaf adults are also useful in many ways in education.

Deaf and hearing people working together in a school or classroom can help each other and benefit the children.

Opportunities to train as teachers of deaf children have been, and still are, limited in many countries. Nevertheless much good work has been done. As more training opportunities are provided there will be more and more trained teachers. Some of these will be deaf themselves.

Some of the teachers may be deaf from childhood, some may be deafened people (becoming deaf later in life - see Introduction) some may be partially hearing (having some hearing). It is good for deaf children to meet a range of different deaf people.

It is important that there is good communication between all these people and the deaf children. It is easier if everyone uses sign language. It is right to respect deaf people who choose not to use sign language. But it is better not to employ them in schools where sign language is used.

Deaf children need role models

Deaf people, who are happy and successful in all kinds of jobs and in their lives, provide role models for deaf children.

How can deaf people communicate with the wider world?

One of the most important ways for deaf people to communicate with hearing people who do not understand sign language is through trained interpreters.

Interpreters are people who are trained to translate the sign language into spoken language. They go with deaf people to meetings, hospital, court, places of worship, lectures and all other activities where communication between deaf people and hearing people is taking place.

Interpreting is a skill and takes a long time to learn. Where there are no trained interpreters, friends and family who can use sign language are needed to help communication between deaf and hearing people. But it is better to use trained professionals if possible.

Trained interpreters follow an ethical code. More and more interpreters are slowly being trained in Africa and other continents. There are, for example, two universities in South Africa which offer training at graduate and post-graduate level. Other countries have courses which

help people who already know sign language to train “on the job”.

More and more hearing people want to learn sign language just as they would learn any other language. Some hearing children, especially the siblings of deaf children, enjoy learning sign language.

there are two deaf members of parliament in Africa

Some deaf people study at university and get degrees at all levels.

Some more questions to discuss or think about:

1. Why is it important for a deaf child to learn to communicate?
2. What is it like for a teacher of hearing children to have a deaf child join the class?
3. How would you help that teacher?
4. How many ways can you think of to help a family include their deaf child in the daily happenings?

Do you know where sign language can be learned in your own locality?

Programme 2

Education for the deaf

Deaf children need and have a right to education (see Programme 1).

At present many deaf children do not have that opportunity. They can be helped at home and in the community in many ways, particularly if people find ways of communicating with them, playing with them and being friends with them.

Can you think of ways of helping deaf children who cannot go to school?

Fortunately many countries are trying very hard to increase the opportunities for deaf children to have access to education. As well as governments, deaf people themselves and parents have set up schools and classes. Local communities have found ways of including deaf children in local schools.

One deaf man started all the schools for deaf children, and the training for teachers of the deaf, in one region in PDR Congo. A small school in Uganda has been set up by a group of parents. A deaf man in Barbados is teaching a few deaf children. A group of parents have started a school in India. Just a few examples. There are many more.

There are different forms of schooling that have been established for deaf children. All of them have some advantages and some disadvantages.

In some places parents may be able to choose how their children are educated in other places there may not be any choice. Wherever the children are educated it is important that parents are involved in the education.

Some schools are only for deaf children (this is called “special schooling”).

Some advantages are:

- ▶ that the children have other deaf children to play with and to learn with
- ▶ that there are more teachers and a bigger range of subjects and skills can be taught
- ▶ there may be more specialist equipment and books available
- ▶ often there are deaf adults doing many of the other jobs in the school – cleaning, cooking, house-parenting, etc.

Some disadvantages are:

- ▶ that the children may not learn how to live in society with many different people. They may find it hard to settle after they leave school and their friends
- ▶ residential schools are very costly. In many countries it is too expensive to build enough schools for all the deaf children
- ▶ parents may find it expensive to fetch the children home for the holidays and take them back when term starts.

They may be tempted to leave the children at school without visiting them

The school may be a day school. But often the school has to serve a wide area and therefore will be a boarding school.

Some disadvantages are:

- ▶ that the children may lose touch with their families
- ▶ that the children do not often meet hearing children
- ▶ that the children may miss the activities of school during the holidays. They may not have friends in the local community

Some advantages are:

- ▶ that it is likely that they will have many deaf friends when they leave school
- ▶ that they have no difficulty in communicating with each other outside lesson times
- ▶ that there is no danger of the children feeling the isolation that deaf children often feel if they are only with people and children who have difficulty in communicating with them

Some of the big residential schools (for example in Ethiopia) have been educating deaf children for a long time and provided a resource of well-educated deaf people who can help new schools and units.

Some deaf children are taught in classes (often called “Units”) attached to regular schools for hearing children. These are usually day schools.

An advantage is that the children, deaf and hearing, play together. Sometimes they do things like art and games together. They grow up knowing about each other. They may be in the same school as their brothers and sisters.

A disadvantage is that, in so small a group of deaf children, it may be difficult

to meet all the varying needs. They may be excluded from some activities because they are deaf.

Some deaf children are placed in a class of hearing children (this is usually called “mainstreaming”). This is a placement with difficulties unless there is some special help and attention for the deaf child. The child may not understand what the teacher is saying and doing. The other children may exclude or make fun of the deaf child.

In some communities all the children, hearing, deaf, physically or intellectually disabled, blind, go to school together (this is often called “inclusive education”). The main advantage is that this provides a real-life situation, but it does need teachers to be able to understand and adapt to many different children and their needs.

Sometimes all the disabled children go to school together. If this is the situation, it is important that everyone realizes that the deaf children are able to learn as much as any hearing child with the same level of intelligence. (Deaf children have the same range of intelligence as any other group of children – most are average, some may be brighter, some may be less so).

In some countries there are so many deaf children needing education that including them in regular schools may be the only way to provide for them all.

All these ways of educating deaf children depend on good teaching. They depend on good communication. Where these are present, each way has some advantages and some disadvantages.

Can you think of other advantages and disadvantages not listed above?

Some reminders

Reading is a very important part of education. It is part of literacy. There are several definitions of literacy, but most include ability to read and write (see Programme 1). Children are said to have

a “reading age”. This means that they can read books and other things that the majority of children of that age can read.

Example: A child with a reading age of seven can read what most seven-year-olds can read. Some seven-year-olds may have a reading age below seven, some above seven, but most will be able to read at the same level.

For many years, in all parts of the world, people have been worried because deaf children often have a lower reading age than their hearing peers. Now new ways of helping to improve this are being developed.

Helpful Reading: Paul, P. (1998). *The Development of Reading, Writing and Literate Thought*

Many deaf adults in Africa have not been able to go to school. Some are learning to read in adult life, but some have not had that opportunity.

Here are some questions for you to think about or discuss:

1. Which of the different ways of education do you think is better for deaf children? Can you say why you think this?
2. What do you think may be the problems for the teachers who have one deaf child in their class of hearing children? How could the problems be solved?
3. Do you know what hearing children feel about having deaf children in their school? Ask some hearing children to think about it and tell you.
4. Do you think that there is a difference between the educational needs of deaf children at the beginning of primary education and deaf children at the end of primary education?

Secondary and vocational education is needed for deaf young people. There are increasing opportunities for this in many countries in Africa but still not enough.

Before school

It is very important that communication with a deaf child begins very early. Parents communicate with babies right from birth. If a child is found to have been born deaf then the communication needs to continue in every way the parent can think of. Sometimes it is helpful to bring a deaf person into the child’s life so that the child and the family can start to use sign language.

Some young deaf children can be sent to pre-school. This may be for deaf children only, or it may be for other children. Then it is helpful if somebody there learns sign language. Sometimes a deaf adult can go with the small child.

Sometimes families are very clever at developing a “home-sign-language” with the babies and small children. This may only be understood within the family but is helpful in preparing for sign-language learning.

School-age children

When children lose their hearing, at whatever age, it is important that communication continues. The use of sign language helps with this.

Using the signs of the sign language with talking is helpful until sign language has been learned by the child and the family and community. This is not sign language but it is signed/spoken language.

Some children who lose their hearing when they are older may learn to lip-read. This means they can see what people are saying by watching their faces and mouths. This is a difficult skill, because many sounds that are used in talking are not visible so words may look alike but be different. These difficulties differ in each spoken language but two examples from English are:

- coat and goat look the same
- ship and shop look nearly the same

Can you see the difference in lip-reading between children and chicken?

"send the children to market"

"send the chicken to market"

Some children become good at this difficult skill, especially children who knew the spoken language well before they lost their hearing. These children can be encouraged to improve their skill and add it to the sign language they are learning and using. It is difficult for even the best lip-readers to get the full content of a lesson or conversation from lip-reading by itself.

Here is another question for you to think about:

Do you think it is easier for an older child who goes deaf to stay in the same school, or go to a special school for deaf children? (note: in many countries the child *has* to go to the special school)?

Education is something that family, school and community are all involved in

Education includes the social and cultural background of the family and community. It includes the decisions and happenings of the family, community, locality and nation.

Deaf children have a broader knowledge if they know these things and the culture, decisions and happenings of deaf people.

More about education

Many people are interested in bilingualism and biculturalism. It is interesting for everybody if they know more than one language and share in more than one culture.

Some schools for deaf children describe the education they offer as "bilingual and bicultural". They are teaching the deaf children sign language and the written form of spoken language.

Some people believe that it is better to learn sign language well first and then learn reading and writing; other people think that the two can be learned at the same time.

There are some schools with classes for deaf children where all the children learn both languages.

One of the very good things about bicultural education is that deaf children become familiar with the ways of interaction and behaviour of both cultures.

Read again what was written in Programme 1 about deaf adults working in schools either as teachers themselves or working with the hearing teachers.

Wherever deaf children are educated they need to follow the full educational programme that the hearing children follow and, as much as is possible, **take the same public examinations**. Some will then go on to higher education and professional qualifications.

There is a great deal more involved in learning by and teaching of deaf children.

Helpful reading: *Quigley, S. P. (1982). The Education of Deaf Children (Edward Arnold)*

A little about ways that help deaf children to learn

It is a mistake to think that it is easy for deaf children to learn. Deafness makes it difficult. Sign language helps considerably.

It is a mistake to think that it is easy to teach deaf children. Teachers develop special skills and understanding. There are many good teachers of deaf children throughout all countries, including those in Africa. Most of these have found sign language a great help in their work.

Some of the education starts at home ... looking at pictures and books, counting, drawing, colouring, matching pictures and objects.

In school the teacher will use many

visual materials for the children. Stories can be told with pictures and objects matched to the printed names. It is not hard to learn the names of, and signs for, many objects. Words and signs for actions are a little harder. Children learn quite easily about colours and shapes. Soon they may start to put the signs together. This needs a lot of practice and many different examples.

Practical activities help. Communicating about them together, and telling other people about them also help.

Some schools use sign language, reading and writing together and call it “total communication”. These are schools that use all three from the beginning of the child’s education. Many schools add speech as well. Hearing teachers may find it difficult not to talk while they are using sign language. It helps to remember that no two languages can be used at the same time! So using spoken language and signed language together causes only confusion! But the teacher is well equipped by **knowing** both languages well.

Deaf children benefit from having plenty of experiences to discuss and learn about. The ordinary activities of outside-the-classroom are good teaching aids. Going to places is better than looking at pictures of the places. Making things, or watching them being made, can be very helpful.

But the language to think about the experiences, to remember them, to tell other people about them, will be provided by the teacher. **Drawing** , and, when the children are ready, **writing** , will help to “fix” the learning.

If possible, go and look at some deaf children in school. Then think about what seemed best and what seemed not so good about what you have seen.

The responsibility of government

The laws and educational arrangements of each country are different. But it is most important that people in authority, and people who have power, understand the needs of deaf children.

Each country may make its own decisions about how best to provide education for all deaf children, but the efforts of parents, teachers and communities need the force of legislation and the involvement of government.

Legislation is very important but implementation is more important.

Here are some questions for you to think about or discuss:

1. How can deaf children be included in regular schools?
2. Can you think of ways that fathers can be involved in their deaf child's education? And grandparents?
3. What difficulties do you think might arise in teaching older deaf children about politics?

More helpful reading: Kyle, J.G. (ed.) (1994). *Growing up in Sign and Word*. See in particular: pp.1-10; 54-69; 89-97. (Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol, UK)

Programme 3

Early identification of deafness

Deafness is a “hidden” or “invisible” disability. You cannot see by looking at a child whether that child is or is not deaf. This is why it is important to test all babies as early as possible to see whether they hear well or whether there is some deafness.

Some countries have programmes for “screening” (sorting out) all children. These programmes test all babies, and may be provided in the community (under CBR-community-based rehabilitation) or by the health services in hospitals, clinics, and other specially designated places.

Testing is a skilled process. But there are some simple tests that can be done if a trained person is not available.

See: *Let's Communicate Section 6 (Hearing-Impairment) (1997). WHO, UNICEF and Ministry of Health, Zimbabwe*

Children should be tested at any age if the parent or teacher suspects that the child cannot hear well. Children who have been ill, especially with fevers, ear infections or meningitis, should be tested to see if the hearing has been affected.

It is important to find out quickly so that help can be provided as quickly as possible (see Programme 3).

Remember that hearing loss affects communication, and the social, emotional, educational and vocational aspects of the life of the individual. It affects the family and the community too.

The amount of hearing loss varies a great deal. What can be heard and what

cannot be heard varies a great deal. The use people make of what they can hear varies a great deal.

You will find that many different terms are used to describe people's hearing loss. People who are deaf can be divided into two main groups. The division is between those who have enough hearing to rely on auditory perception and those who rely on visual perception.

People who can rely on auditory perception are usually referred to as “hard of hearing”. But the terms “partially deaf” and “partially hearing” are sometimes used as well. The primary communication of this group is spoken language and lip reading. Some hand signs, or sign language, may be preferred by some people in this group. Where available, a hearing aid may be beneficial (see Programme 3).

“Partially hearing” is also used for those deaf people who rely on visual perception but find that they have some additional help from sound.

People who get little help from sound, or seem to hear nothing at all, are those described as “deaf”. The deafness is often referred to as “severe” or “profound”.

You will see that the use of terms varies and is imprecise, which is why an accurate test of the real hearing loss is important.

There are two more terms that are used when describing deafness. The first is “pre-lingual deafness”. This refers to a person who has been deaf from birth or before spoken language developed.

Deafness from birth is also described as “congenital”. The second is “post-lingual deafness”. This refers to persons who became deaf after their spoken language had started to develop. These persons are also described as “deafened”.

“Deafened” persons may be of any age and their preferred communication will depend on when they became deaf. It is not easy for persons who become deaf after many years of listening and talking to learn sign language. This is mainly because they have relied for so long on auditory perception that to change to visual perception is not easy.

Sometimes **fingerspelling** helps deafened persons. This is a communication way that spells out spoken language letter by letter and is read by the other person. All sign languages include a way of spelling the letters of spoken language. Most use one hand for this, but some use both hands.

The term “hearing impaired” is often used but deaf people do not find it acceptable. This is because it suggests something that must be repaired or fixed, or even cured.

Deaf culture considers deafness a social disability (depending on society’s view and attitude) and not a medical disability (needing cure or change).

Measuring hearing loss

Hearing is usually tested using an audiometer. This is an instrument that produces sounds at certain levels. It is important that the instrument is carefully checked at regular intervals for accuracy.

The tester has various ways (according to the age and maturity of the person being tested) of getting the person who is being tested to indicate when a sound is heard. It is important that the hands of the tester cannot be seen.

The tester records the results of the test on a form which is called an **audio - gram**. This form shows what, if anything,

a person hears. It also shows whether that person hears any of the sounds that make up speech.

One test is not usually enough, it needs to be repeated several times, especially with children, in order to be sure an accurate response has been found. It also needs repeating regularly, usually at yearly intervals, to note any changes.

Hearing does not get better but it may decrease. Sometimes it appears to have got better because the person has learned how to make use of what is heard.

An audiogram may also show whether a hearing aid, if available, would be helpful. Hearing aids differ and the audiogram also shows which hearing aid is suitable for the person. Many people cannot benefit from hearing aids.

Hearing aids increase some sounds. Louder sound is not always helpful (just as shouting at a deaf person is never helpful!)

Two words are used to describe sound. One is “decibel” and the other is “frequency”. Decibels (db or dB) measure the intensity (loudness) of sound and frequency measures the speed of the electrical waves that produce each sound. The unit of measurement is the kilohertz (kHz).

A whisper measures 20db
A nearby lorry going up a hill,
changing gear measures 90db
A jet engine taking off
measures 140db

Noise

Exposure for a long time to very loud sounds can damage hearing. Young people who listen often to loud music can become deaf. Workers who use drills and other noisy tools and machinery need to protect their ears with ear muffs.

Noise in the environment is not only unpleasant, it can cause stress and hearing loss if it goes on too long.

Causes of Deafness

Some deafness comes from genetic causes. This may be present in one or both parents. The deafness may be from birth or appear later in life (at all ages). This is sometimes described as “hereditary deafness”.

Many different illnesses and conditions, in the womb (pre-natal) or after birth, (post-natal) or later, can cause deafness. There are too many to list in this manual, but many fevers result in deafness. Meningitis is a major cause of deafness.

Rubella (sometimes called “German measles”) is a major cause in many countries. This is often such a slight illness that the person who has it does not really feel ill. Unfortunately if that person is in the early months of pregnancy the baby may be deaf, and/or have other disabilities. This is often the reason for babies being born with hearing and sight loss (deaf-blind).

Deaf-blind children and young people need very specialized help. Several countries in Africa are now setting up schools and centres where parents and children can be helped. East Africa has developed some good specialized programmes.

Helpful Reading: Prakabar, I., Loenig, C., and Tesni, S. (eds.) (1998). Listening to Sounds and Signs Books for Change, pp. 87-131

Some deaf children may also have a sight disability called Usher Syndrome. This is usually seen as the child gets older. There are several types of Usher, but all limit vision.

More information from *Sense, 1-13 Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park, London N4 3SR, U.K.*

Some infections which lead to discharge from the ear can be cleared up by using prescribed medicines. It is important to clear them up before the hearing becomes damaged.

Wax sometimes builds up in the ear and prevents good hearing. It should be removed by a nurse or doctor. Sometimes chil-

dren put objects in their ears. These should also be removed by a nurse or doctor.

Never put anything in the ear (e.g. matchsticks, cotton-buds, hairpins, tooth picks). The ear is easily damaged.

Accidents, especially to the head, war damage, blows, may cause deafness. **Never hit anyone on the ear.**

Changes of altitude and drug abuse may also cause deafness.

Some questions to consider or discuss:

1. What would you do if you saw a child whose ears were discharging?
2. Mothers are often the first to suspect a baby is deaf, especially if it is not the first baby. Why do you think this is?
3. Talk about the sounds that you like and the sounds that you do not like. Why do you think different people like different sounds?
4. Do you find some sounds painful? Think about hearing aids. Might some deaf children find them painful? If you think “yes”, why do you think that might be?

Everybody has a “threshold of pain”. If a sound is loud enough to reach that level it hurts.

Tinnitus is a condition where a person hears different noises in their ears but these noises do not come from any outside source. Some people find these noises difficult to live with. Listening to a radio sometimes helps. Deaf children may sometimes have tinnitus.

Hearing aids

Hearing aids are small instruments that amplify (make louder) sounds, especially the sounds that make up speech. There are many different kinds of hearing aids. Body aids have an amplifier that is separate from the other parts; head-worn or behind-the-ear aids have all the parts together near the ear. Some aids go right in the ear.

The right hearing aid can help some

people. But they are expensive and need maintenance (repair and replacement). They are powered by batteries which are expensive and do not last very long. In hot countries batteries wear out more quickly. One or two aids that use solar power have been developed. The prescription and maintenance of hearing aids requires trained technicians. It has usually been considered that a country needs a reliable infrastructure (transport, technical equipment, etc.) before hearing aids can be made available.

Hearing aids may help some children but it is possible to give deaf children a good education without hearing aids. Hearing aids cannot replace hearing that has been lost, or has never been there.

How to get your child tested

In many countries in Africa there are organizations, health services, hospitals and community-based programmes that screen children for hearing loss. For example, in Kenya and Uganda there is the Educational Assessment and Resource Services (EARS) programme. The workers in this programme are trained to assess children no matter where they live and how much money their families have. If they find a hearing loss they help the family know what to do; they provide advice for management and education.

If you are watching the video that accompanies this manual, whoever arranged the screening of the video can give you information about local assessment arrangements.

What happens next?

If the assessment shows that the child is deaf the child *might* be sent to a doctor for further assessment. Information about local schooling for deaf children will be given to the family.

It is important to remember that attention to the child's language and com-

munication needs must start at once. Delay in access to language and information leads to many difficulties now and in the future (see Programme 2).

It is important to think of the best ways to help the child feel part of the family and part of the community, and to make sure that the child goes on learning about the environment and family activities (see Programme 4).

Introducing deaf adults and sign language will be very helpful. It is good if the assessment advisers can introduce the parents to other parents of deaf children (see Programme 4), and introduce the deaf child to other deaf children.

Deaf adults will want to help and will have the knowledge to help. They will arrange, if possible, to teach sign language to the family and the community.

It is important to use every possible way of communicating. When small children watch adults and other children using hands, faces, eyes and bodies, to convey messages they pick it up quite easily. There are many ways of adapting the communication to the deaf child's needs. This helps the child to feel secure in, and part of, the family. The child feels recognised and accepted, and does not become lonely or isolated.

Children who feel isolated or rejected may become angry and miserable. They may reject other people, even their own families. This may continue as they grow up.

Sometimes deaf children are naughty or difficult to manage if they do not have communication with their family.

Some questions for you to think about or discuss:

1. What do you think may happen to a child whose deafness is not diagnosed?
2. Can you think of ways to encourage the local hearing children to include the deaf child in their activities?
3. How many ways can you think of that might help you to tell a small deaf child that a relative would be visiting at the weekend?

Programme 4

Parents of deaf children

Most deaf children are born to parents who are hearing. This is one reason why there are sometimes communication problems between deaf children and their parents. Parents often find it very hard to cope with the information that their child is deaf.

It is encouraging for the parent to realize that, even though their child is deaf, it does not mean that the child will have a terrible life, without education, job and future prospects. It is encouraging to realize that the child can be educated, can grow up and be employed, can be a responsible and productive member of society.

Then the parents and family members find it easier to adapt their communication to the child. They become ready to involve themselves in the educational needs of the child.

Parents are expert at bringing up children **Deaf children are children**

To think about:

- ▶ 90% of deaf children have hearing parents
- ▶ deaf children with deaf parents learn signed language as fast as hearing children learn spoken language
- ▶ the earlier a deaf child learns to sign, the quicker the child learns. The child is likely to learn to read and write more easily too.

To remember:

- ▶ deaf adults and organizations of deaf people are the people to help parents and families to learn sign language. Some have classes for this; some can provide reading materials about sign language.

To think about and discuss:

- ▶ independence and self-confidence are very important for children. Sometimes parents are over-protective, or do too much, for the deaf child. How can the independence appropriate to each child's age, be encouraged?
- ▶ deaf children sometimes lose their rights in the family, being passed over for responsibilities and privileges. What are the appropriate duties of children in the family in your community?

Possibly the most helpful person to a parent with a deaf child is another parent who also has a deaf child. Parents can help each other. Where there are groups of parents they often form organizations so they can meet together, pool ideas and resources, support each other, and advise parents whose children are newly diagnosed.

Some organizations are for the parents of one school. There is one organization like this in Ethiopia. In Tanzania an organization covers a group of schools. In Uganda and Kenya the organizations are national. Other countries are now forming organizations.

Some organizations organize sign language classes for themselves. Parents have begun to start their own schools (see Programme 2). A group can ask for help from the community, from local groups such as church parishes or other faith groups, or from the adult deaf community much more successfully than a single parent.

A group can sometimes get premises and employ a teacher. This is often very successful for organizing pre-school education and activities. Some groups have found employing a deaf person a good move. Sometimes the local special school for deaf children will help such a pre-school with advice.

It is usually easier to get funding from, for example, NGOs or local authorities after setting something up than before.

This kind of arrangement has its difficulties and is not possible everywhere. But everywhere it is good for parents to meet and work together as much as possible. Together they can make their children heard as part of the community.

Deaf adults tend to be very sympathetic to the needs of deaf children and are usually willing to help the parents of deaf children in providing an enabling environment for the children.

Parents may feel pulled between the claims and needs of the deaf child and the claims and needs of the other children in the family. It is important that professionals and others consider the **whole** family.

Involvement and “ownership”

Parents and communities that set up their own schools for deaf children remain involved with the school. It may become the place where they meet each other, set up classes in sign language, discuss things of interest to them all. They are able to see that their children are learning, and happy, and note when the school is running smoothly. They can, as appropriate, join in the classes, contribute skills, help, and support.

This involvement of parents in their children’s education is important and valuable. It also means that the children and their parents know each other well and have shared experiences. It helps communication between them.

Families with children at boarding schools need to find other ways of working together and with the school in order to be more involved in their children’s education. This will strengthen the links between home and school. They need to pay careful attention to maintaining communication between themselves and their children.

Some questions for you to think about or discuss:

1. If you have a deaf child at a local school, what skills or other contribution could you offer to share with your child’s school?
2. Is there a good postal system in your neighbourhood? Could parents write to their deaf children? What sort of things do you think the children want to know in a letter?
3. Do you think sending drawings and photographs to a child in boarding school would be helpful?

Organizations of parents and organizations of deaf people

- ▶ share the same goals – better education and more opportunities for deaf people
- ▶ together they can lobby decision-makers
- ▶ they can make themselves known and recognized in the community
- ▶ they can share and understand both deaf and hearing culture.

Some more about deaf culture

If you can read the quarterly magazine of the World Federation of the Deaf (see the list of addresses on page 32) you can learn

about deaf culture. Your own National Association of Deaf People may have a regular magazine or bulletin too.

Deaf culture expresses itself through:

- ▶ particular ways of interaction, for example of attracting attention and of maintaining privacy
- ▶ special socializing activities. These always include a great deal of communicating together in sign language.
- ▶ involvement in the affairs of the deaf community
- ▶ telling news and stories
- ▶ worship together. Some churches have deaf pastors. Other churches have sign language interpreters. There are interpreters in most of the mosques in Egypt
- ▶ sports events. There is a World Deaf Sports Association and activities like chess are national and international. Schools often join together for sports events.

The growth of deaf culture worldwide is an interesting growth.

Interesting videos: Deaf Nation Symposium 1997 and 1999. Forest Bookshop

Hearing people can share in deaf culture, and using sign language is the most important way of sharing and learning the way the culture operates.

It is very helpful to deaf children when the two cultures respect each other and the children feel part of the deaf culture. They value their parents' involvement in that culture.

Think about the situation of any deaf person who does not have other deaf people to communicate with.

Helpful reading: Nolan, M. (1981). *The Hearing Impaired Child in the Family* (Condor Press) Report of a Parents Workshop held in Mzimba, Malawi, obtainable from Initiatives for Deaf Education, 7 King Street, Much Wenlock TF13 6BL, U.K.

Programme 5

Creating employment for deaf people

People who work and earn their living are productive members of society. Provided they are educated and trained, deaf people are able to be productive members of society.

There are still many deaf people, in Africa and elsewhere, who are unable to work because they have not received this education and training. This is a situation that is disabling in itself. Many who are at work are limited to jobs like manual labouring, whereas, with better education and training, they might have better jobs (see Programme 1).

Some facts:

- ▶ there are deaf professors in some countries, for example in the United States of America
- ▶ there are university departments for deaf students where many of the lecturers are deaf, for example in England
- ▶ in some countries deaf students go to regular universities and colleges and have sign language interpreters, note-takers and other help, for example in Norway.

In poor economies some deaf people are not working because jobs are scarce, or the deaf people have not been given the skills that the economy needs. Sometimes the deaf persons have not been trained for a working life.

It is unfortunate when some families think the deaf child cannot, or need not, work. It is unfortunate when some hear-

ing people are afraid that deaf people will not be able to do certain jobs or work the full hours.

It is important that parents and those responsible for education balance the importance (an increasing need in today's world) of learning to read and write with skills training. Sometimes, in the past, too much time has been given to job-skill training.

Some questions for you to think about and discuss:

1. What are the most important skills your locality and country need?
2. Do you think there are any difficulties when deaf and hearing people work together? If so, what help can be given to both?
3. What responsibilities and duties can be given to young deaf children, at home and at school, that might prepare them for work later on?

Opportunities for deaf people

Previous programmes have stressed that deaf children can learn to read and write, do arithmetic, geometry, and all the school subjects. They can absorb all the concepts necessary for any subject. Some may reach a high level and be qualified for a wide range of posts and professions. It is important to give older children information about many possible careers. Sometimes teachers and parents have had limited ideas about what young deaf peo-

ple can do. Sometimes a limited range of careers and jobs has been explained.

But there are deaf accountants, scientists, teachers, computer experts, geographers, technical designers, farmers, agronomists, office workers, hairdressers; in fact there are *very* few jobs that are not being done by some deaf people somewhere.

It is unfair and unjust to limit deaf people either educationally or job-wise. Secondary and tertiary education opportunities for deaf (and hearing) children remain limited in many parts of Africa, and elsewhere, but they are increasing.

Sometimes, even when the deaf person has the right training and skills, employers are reluctant to give them the job. Usually, once they have taken one good deaf worker, they are quickly willing to take more.

**A school in Ethiopia has
a notice outside which says:
"Deaf Workers are Good Workers
- Try one"**

- ▶ deaf adults can work in schools for deaf children as teachers, classroom assistants, house-parents, outside workers, etc. (see Programme 2)
- ▶ deaf persons can have their own businesses and employ others, both deaf and hearing. A deaf man in Zambia has a thriving chicken preparation business
- ▶ organizations of parents and of deaf people can organize courses in business training
- ▶ many deaf people are self-employed and work alone
- ▶ computer training is becoming more and more available for deaf people
- ▶ adult education classes, both to extend the learning of those who have been to school, and to teach literacy and communication to those who have not been to school are important

Low expectations from society disable deaf people

Parents, teachers and deaf people themselves are able, together, to inform society.

Remember:

- ▶ It is important for all children to have the opportunity to study as long as it is practically and financially possible.
- ▶ It is important for all children to have the opportunity to take public examinations and qualifications at the highest level possible.
- ▶ It is important to give all children the fullest possible information about employment and careers.

There are, in every country, increasing opportunities for deaf people to be involved in sign language teaching, interpreter training, deaf awareness (for hearing people) courses, skill training (for deaf and hearing people).

Some questions for you to think about and discuss:

1. Are there any jobs you think a deaf person could not do? Why do you think this?
2. What do you think are the most important things to tell an employer who is thinking about giving a job to a deaf person?
3. Which is the most disabling attitude of society as far as deaf people are concerned? How would you change this?
4. What does the term "role model" mean to you?

It is often necessary to lobby government for legislation in connection with employment.

It is always necessary to inform society that deaf people can do everything except hear.

It is important to be alert to opportunities for deaf people's employment. New technologies and processes come up all the time.

Programme 6

Organizations of deaf people

Why are organizations of the deaf important?

It is difficult for individual deaf people to change the condition of their lives. Not all deaf people have this need, but the fact that the hearing community may not understand deaf people can make conditions difficult. One person does not really have the power to bring about changes, but several people working together in an organization are able to do this.

An organization has strength and visibility. It can speak out clearly. It cannot be brushed aside so easily.

An organization can ask for:

- ▶ recognition of sign language
- ▶ access to education
- ▶ access to public services

An organization can remind the government that deaf people are citizens. They make the same contributions to society (taxes, etc.) as other citizens, and are entitled to any benefits other citizens receive.

An organization can:

- ▶ make sure that all the members keep abreast of important news and information
- ▶ give the wider public good information about deaf people and their concerns

A well-led national organization of deaf people can be very powerful and look after the interests of the whole deaf community - adults, young people and children. It can help parents (see Pro-

gramme 4). It can unite and inform stakeholders, other interested parties and service providers. Together all these different people can collaboratively form a powerful lobbying group. Most countries have such a National Organization of Deaf People. Many have started small, but have grown to be self-supporting and self-sustaining. Many have paid staff. Most are staffed by deaf people who handle the budget, make plans and decisions, organize training courses and workshops. They run the organizations very professionally.

These organizations are a valuable resource to deaf people, and for hearing people who live or work with deaf people. They can provide services to:

- ▶ Community Based Rehabilitation Programmes (CBR)
- ▶ health workers
- ▶ social workers
- ▶ NGOs (non-governmental organizations)
- ▶ donors and researchers

Some questions for you to think about or discuss:

1. Do you know who is the chairperson of the National Association of Deaf People in your country?
2. Do you know about any activity organized by that association?
3. Deaf people cannot hear the news or public announcements on radio or television. How do you think they can be kept in touch?

Deaf organizations and sign language

Many deaf organizations have started to promote the use of sign language. They train interpreters and make sure that they are fluent in both languages (see Programme 1). They help the interpreters to understand deaf culture, and how best to serve a deaf client. They help the deaf client to make best use of an interpreter. They prepare interpreters to work in many different situations - hospital, court, worship etc.

Some interpreters are skilled at television interpreting, employment interviews, etc. Telephone relay services exist in some countries. This involves hearing people passing on telephone conversations using phones that print out messages.

Government, NGOs and service providers have some responsibilities in the provision of interpreters. For example, if a court case needs interpreting it may be that the court can help with funding an interpreter. An employer who interviews a deaf person for a post might help to fund that interpreter. Some services employ full-time interpreters.

National and international links

Many local organizations are affiliated to national associations. National organizations often cooperate.

In Africa, for example, there are:

Uganda	UNAD
Kenya	KNAD

Ghana	GNAD
South Africa	DEAFSA
Tanzania	TNAD
People's Republic of Congo	ASOP

and many more.

Many countries have sign language dictionaries which can be obtained from the offices of the appropriate national association.

These associations, and those across the world, are affiliated to the **World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)**. WFD is divided regionally and each region has its own Secretariat. In Africa there is an Eastern and a Southern African secretariat, for example. Secretariats are responsible for holding regional events and meetings. Each secretariat has a representative on the WFD itself.

Every four years there is a **World Congress**. This is attended by hundreds of deaf people from all over the world. They have meetings, lectures, workshops, business meetings and social events.

The World Federation cooperates with many international organizations and bodies and has a strong, well-regarded, voice. Examples of these are UNESCO and WHO. This means that WFD speaks and acts for all national bodies, in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Australasia. The World Federation is a powerful advocate for all deaf people.

The WFD headquarters are in Stockholm, Sweden. WFD congress reports can be obtained from the WFD offices and from your National Association.

Some Addresses

Books and videos have been referred to in the manual programme sections. You may be able to buy or borrow these locally. If not, they can usually be obtained from:

The Forest Bookshop Warehouse
89 Crucible Court
Coleford
Glos GL16 8RF
U.K.
Tel: 44+(0) 1594 833858
Fax: 44+(0) 1594 833446
e-mail: deafbooks@forestbooks.com
Forest Bookshop issue a regularly updated mail order catalogue.

The following books can be obtained from UNESCO, either from your regional office of from:

7 Place de Fontenoy
75353 Paris 07 SP
France
Tel: 33+(0) 45 68 11 95
Fax: 33+(0) 45 68 56 26/27/28

International Consultation on Early Childhood Education and Special Educational Needs 1997

World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Needs 1990

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action 1994

Consultation Report on Inclusive Education and the Deaf Child (UNESCO Pretoria Office) 1999

The Dakar Framework for Action 2000

WHO Publications are available from:
CH-1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland

You can ask for more references from:
World Federation of the Deaf
Magnus Ladulåsgatan 63, 4tr
118 27 Stockholm
SWEDEN
Website: <http://www.wfdnews.org>