



Describing the severity of a hearing loss

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When hearing loss is measured, it will be described as mild, moderate, severe, profound or a combination of these.

- [Mild hearing loss](#)
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Mild Hearing Loss (21–40dB)

A child with a mild hearing loss may have difficulty hearing soft or distant speech. They may also have difficulty hearing normal conversation in situations where there is a lot of background noise.

To experience a mild hearing loss, try wearing earplugs or blocking your ears with your fingers. You can still hear people talking but it sounds muffled. It is even more difficult to understand the conversation if there is any background noise.

Many children with mild hearing loss do not wear hearing aids. As the loss gets closer to 40dB some children may be fitted with a hearing aid.

How will this impact on learning?

A child with a mild hearing loss will not usually have difficulties related to their hearing loss in school unless they are in very noisy environments.

For more information

- [Babies with a possible mild hearing loss](#)
- [Your baby has a mild hearing loss – What's the next step?](#)
- [Your child has a mild hearing loss – What's the next step?](#)
- [Management of a child with a permanent unaided hearing loss](#)

Moderate Hearing Loss (41-70dB)

A child with a moderate hearing loss will need to wear hearing aids to understand normal speech. Without hearing aids, the child will need to rely on speech reading cues. The level of concentration required to speechread is very difficult to maintain over long periods of time.

Hearing aids make all sounds louder for the child, including background noise. Hearing aids work most effectively in quiet environments.

How will this impact on learning?

A child with a moderate hearing loss may:

- not hear important elements of a class discussion including key context and content without visual cues
- have a smaller or more limited vocabulary than their same age peers
- not hear all the sounds in a word, commonly leaving off 's', 'ing' and 'ed' in their speech and their writing
- have problems pronouncing some speech sounds
- become very tired towards the end of sessions that have required intense concentration or were conducted in noisy environments
- misinterpret what is said although they 'hear' the speaker (they know that someone said something but couldn't hear clearly enough to understand what was said).

Severe hearing loss (71 – 90dB)

A child with a severe loss will have difficulty understanding normal speech even when wearing their hearing aids. They would not detect normal conversation without their hearing aid but may hear loud voices at close distances (up to one metre).

It is important to remember that hearing aids make sounds louder for the child which assists with comprehension but they do not restore normal hearing. Even with hearing aids, a child with a severe hearing loss will need to rely on speechreading cues. The level of concentration required to speechread is very difficult to maintain over long periods of time.

Children with a severe hearing loss may be fitted with a cochlear implant. They will be able to access all speech sounds through the implant, but will have difficulty understanding speech if they are not wearing it.

How will this impact on learning?

A child with a severe hearing loss may:

- not hear important elements of the class discussion including key context and content without visual cues
- have a smaller or more limited vocabulary than their same age peers
- not hear all the sounds in a word, commonly leaving off 's', 'ing' and 'ed' in their speech and their writing
- have problems pronouncing some speech sounds, particularly those in the high frequency such as 's' or 'p'
- become very tired towards the end of sessions that have required intense concentration or were conducted in noisy environments
- misinterpret what is said although they 'hear' the speaker's voice (they know that someone said something but couldn't hear clearly enough to understand what was said)
- have a limited understanding of colloquial language, such as 'pull up your socks'
- have difficulty understanding complex sentences
- have poor vocal quality
- have trouble explaining their ideas to other people
- have limited background knowledge and experiences in a range of areas which can affect learning and social skills.

Profound Hearing Loss (91dB+)

A child with a profound hearing loss will always have trouble understanding conversational speech even with their hearing aids, and would not detect even the loudest components of shouting unaided (without their hearing aid).

Many students with profound hearing loss find traditional hearing aids of limited benefit. The majority of children with a profound hearing loss have cochlear implants.

Children with a profound hearing loss exhibit a wide range of communication skills. Some children develop listening and spoken language as their main means of communication. Other students may need, or prefer, to rely on manual communication skills such as signing.

How will this impact on learning?

A child with a profound hearing loss may:

- not hear important elements of the class discussion including key context and content without visual cues
- have a smaller or more limited vocabulary than their same age peers
- not hear all the sounds in a word, commonly leaving off 's', 'ing' and 'ed' in their speech and their writing
- have problems pronouncing some speech sounds, particularly those in the high frequency such as 's' or 'p'
- become very tired towards the end of sessions that have required intense concentration or were conducted in noisy environments
- misinterpret what is said
- have difficulty with some reading materials
- have a limited understanding of colloquial language, such as 'pull up your socks'
- have difficulty understanding complex sentences
- use a limited range of sentence structures and therefore use the same sentence structure repetitively (e.g. subject, verb, object)
- have trouble explaining their ideas to other people
- have limited background knowledge and experiences in a range of areas which can affect learning and social skills
- have poor vocal quality
- rely on signed communication.

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