

A Deaf or Hard of Hearing Student in the Classroom

Good teaching strategies for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Any good teaching strategy is good not only for deaf students but also their hearing peers. The following is a guide only. For more detailed information, see the resources listed below.

General suggestions

- Value every member of the class and make sure everyone in the classroom has full access to all activities
- Teachers may need to modify some teaching styles and the physical environment to ensure full accessibility for deaf students
- Encourage interactions between the deaf students and their hearing classmates
- Accept the deaf student for themselves. Teacher attitudes play a very important part in the student's success in school
- All students in the classroom, including the deaf student, need to feel important. Emphasis things they can do
- Deaf students should conform to the same standards of discipline as other students in the school
- Never judge a deaf student's method of communication. If you have concerns, speak to their teacher or the deaf or the student's family.

The physical environment

- A deaf student may become more tired than the hearing students due to the need to constantly concentrate in order to hear or watch an interpreter, so provide regular breaks from having to listen or having to watch an interpreter. Teachers can alternate class discussion times with individual work so that the deaf student does not need to concentrate for long periods of time.

For further information about Deaf Children Australia visit our website,
www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

Helpline 1800 645 916 Email helpline@deafchildren.org.au

Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.

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- Deaf students are often visual learners, so an attractive classroom with interesting notice boards and posters around the room assists the student to learn. Visual teaching methods, using pictures, diagrams and word maps, for example, also assist the deaf student.
- The deaf student should be seated so they can see both the teacher and their peers if possible.
- If the classroom cannot be organised into a semicircle, consider having the deaf student sit in the second or third row so they have a comfortable view of the teacher. Any seating arrangement should not isolate the student.
- Try and keep noise, including general student talking to a minimum to reduce background noise. Avoid placing the student near fans or air-conditioners if they are noisy. Shut the door if there is noise in the corridor and window if there is noise outside.
- When showing a video, DVD or listening to a tape recoding, it is possible the deaf student will not be able to understand the words. Raising the volume may make no difference to the clarity of the sound. Most DVDs are subtitled but check on the back of the DVD to see if it has English subtitles. If it is not captioned, try to allow the deaf student the opportunity to take the DVD, video or audio home to listen to it in a quiet space before using it in a classroom situation. If this is not possible, try not using this medium.

Teacher Instructions

- Check that you have the deaf student's attention before you begin to speak.
- Ensure you are not standing in front of a window or your face will be in shadow. If you have facial hair, trim your beard or moustache so it is not covering your lips.
- Try not to move around a lot when speaking.
- Try not to talk with your back is turned or when you are writing on the blackboard. Talk first facing the students, then write.
- Speak naturally without exaggeration.
- A deaf student can't watch the teacher or interpreter and write notes at the same time, so allow time to write once the speaking has stopped or breaks during the speaking to take notes.
- If you can, repeat the question posed by all students before giving your answer. And repeat answers to questions given by the student's peers.
- Try and use natural mime or gesture if need be.
- When explaining new terms or vocabulary, write them on the blackboard and add synonyms and definitions to aid understanding.
- Never shout at the deaf student as the messages becomes distorted through hearing aids or cochlear implants.

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- A slower pace of the lesson may assist. Some deaf student may find it difficult to keep up if the pace is too fast.
- Introduce new materials in small steps and give clear directions and explanations.
- Don't assume that because the deaf student has a cochlear implant or hearing aid they can hear. The student may be able to hear your voice, but be unable to distinguish the words.
- A friend who sits beside the deaf student may help by explaining instructions or work that has not been understood. However, be careful the deaf student does not become dependent on the friend, copy their work or take up too much of their time.
- When reading stories or articles, read at a regular pace.
- Never expect the student's peers to become their interpreters in the classroom.
- Be aware that deaf students have varying degrees of understanding of English. Some students may still be acquiring a full language base and errors may occur in their written expression.
- If the student uses Auslan, they may not use English in their face-to-face communication. Auslan has a different grammar to that of English and has no written correlation.
- Group work may be difficult for the deaf student as the pace and exchange of information may be too fast to follow. Arrange for the student to work in a very small group and/or ask the teacher/integration aid to assist.

Completing Assignments

- Allow extra reading time if needed.
- If the student is writing any lengthy piece of work, ask the student to regularly show you work in progress so you can assist on the spot if necessary.
- If an activity is auditory in nature, you may need to give the deaf student a different task, or greater time to complete it, or a different environment to participate in it.
- Always ensure any written directions for work to be completed are typed, clearly laid out with appropriate spacing and states the work to be undertaken with key terms underlined.
- Always give written due dates for assignments, either on the assignment or on the whiteboard.
- Try to correct the student's work on the basis of the meaning of what they have written, not on the English grammar or vocabulary used. The exception is if you are teaching English itself. If you have concerns, speak to the teacher of the deaf.

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- If the class assignment is based on watching a DVD or video, you may need to change the assignment for the deaf student as they may be unable to understand what is said. Or where possible, use a DVD which has captions. Raising the volume may make no difference to the clarity of the sound. Most DVDs are subtitled but check on the back of the DVD to see if it has English subtitles. If it is not captioned, try to allow the deaf student the opportunity to take the DVD, video or audio home to listen to it in a quiet space before using it in a classroom situation. If this is not possible, try not using this medium.

How to know if a deaf student is not following in the classroom

A few clues that may tell teachers that a deaf student is having difficulty in following the lesson are:

- The student may copy peers
- Answers or responses are not correct
- The student lacks concentration and may have difficulty remembering instructions
- The student becomes tired easily

Teachers can assist by:

- Quietly asking the student questions to check they have understood
- Asking open ended questions rather than “yes” or “no” type questions. Deaf students will often nod their heads to indicate they have understood when in reality they haven’t
- Asking the student to repeat what others have said
- Give the student extra time to respond
- Using good teaching strategies outlined above

Preventing background noise

Background noise, reverberation and distance from the speaker can be real issues for deaf children, even those with mild or unilateral hearing losses, being able to hear in the classroom.

Background noise and reverberation can be minimised by installing carpet on the floor, or a carpet mat. If carpet is not available, make sure the windows have some covering and ensure the students keep noise to a minimum. Placing acoustic tiles on the ceiling helps to absorb background noise. Don’t forget about other noises, such as noisy air conditioners, other machines, noise outside the classroom or in the corridor.

Distance can be overcome by the use of an FM System but some deaf students dislike wearing these.

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Interpreters

- If a student has an interpreter in the classroom, be aware the interpreter may be signing slightly behind the spoken message. Allow for the time lag when asking questions
- Speak to the student, not to the interpreter
- Allow the interpreter rest breaks of five minutes for each twenty minutes of interpreters to avoid Overuse Syndrome occurring. This is chronic amongst interpreters and can easily avoided by alternating written work with group discussions
- Videos and television programs are very demanding to interpret due to the speed and complexity of the message, so allow extra time
- Where possible give preparation material to the interpreter well before classes, particularly when using DVD's or audio mediums.

Integration/teacher aids

Some schools employ integration/teacher aids to assist deaf students. They can assist the student to understand teacher instructions and the classroom content. However some guidelines need to be established in order to ensure the integration aide is used wisely.

- Ensure the integration aide has professional development in the impact of a hearing loss on learning and how to work with deaf students. Working with deaf students is different to working with students with disabilities because it impacts on language and communication. Deafness is also invisible and it is difficult to imagine what it is like to be deaf
- Different strategies may be needed in working with different students, especially at the secondary school level. Sometimes at this level it is inappropriate for the integration/teacher aide to sit beside the student; the aide may be better employed to work as a notetaker for the student
- Be careful the student does not become dependent on the aide. It may be better for the aide to move around the classroom and assist only when needed
- If the aide is providing individual tuition to the deaf student, ensure they are provided with lessons to cover.

Notetakers

A notetaker can assist the deaf student by writing down the content of the lesson for the student to read, either at the same time the lesson is occurring or afterwards

- If an integration/teacher aide is working as a notetaker, organise some training or professional development in taking notes for deaf students
- Notes taken should be well laid out with clear handwriting and correct spelling and punctuation.

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Social development

- Deaf students may feel they are not part of the group due to communication difficulties. This may affect their social behaviour and they may become withdrawn or overly assertive
- Deaf students may not understand rules of group games, especially when they change quickly. Encourage the other students to include the deaf student
- Deaf students may miss the subtleties of speech, such as the tone and intonation which can lead to social issues
- Hearing aids and cochlear implants should be worn in the yard to assist with communication and understanding
- Teach if necessary, appropriate social skills, eg, asking for help, sharing, turn taking
- Be flexible with your approach to discipline by ensuring the deaf student understood the rules and expectations before you make any judgement.

Resources

Check your states Education Department website for information and policies for students with disabilities

www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

Deaf Children Australia

www.deafness.org.au

Deafness Foundation, Victoria

“Are You Being Heard?

Strategies for working with deaf students in the classroom.”

This booklet is available from the Deaf Children Australia website or the Deafness Foundation website.

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