

## Communication

For all children, early exposure to a rich fluent language model is critically important for all later language learning. The Sensory Service seeks to support good language development no matter which communication approach is used.

A flexible approach to communication is important so that whatever approach is chosen maximises the educational opportunities for the child or young person. Every child has the right to develop effective communication.

With newborn hearing screening widely offered within the first weeks after birth, deafness can be identified early. Since babies begin to develop language and communication from their earliest months, this means that much can be done to positively support and encourage that development. Research has shown that when early identification of deafness is combined with effective early intervention, with parents and professionals working together, language outcomes for deaf children can be similar to those for hearing children.

Most deaf children who are identified through the newborn hearing screening programme, have the potential to acquire a high level of competency in spoken and written language.

The development of language in deaf children will usually follow the same language acquisition process as for hearing children, through meaningful interaction and conversation. Although language may be delayed due to hearing loss, for the majority of deaf children, language acquisition will match other aspects of the child's development. However, individual deaf children have a variety of communication needs and these may change over time.

There is no one communication approach which works best for all deaf children and all families. Sometimes, depending on circumstances and needs, different approaches work well at different times for the same child and family.

A child's communication method should promote an enjoyable and meaningful experience with other people through language. Parents should be fully involved in all discussions regarding how their child will communicate and how that will be promoted, developed and monitored.

Teachers of the Deaf in the Sensory Service will provide parents with clear, balanced information to allow them to make an informed choice about the communication and language approach for their child.

The communication method needed is the one which works best for the individual child and family.

A family may want to change or modify the approach as they learn more about their child's needs and preferences and as the child grows and develops.

The service aims to offer parents and families support to use whichever method best supports them and their child

The National Deaf Children's Society has produced useful information [here](#) to consider when thinking about communication approaches.

## **Approaches to communication**

**Auditory-Oral** approaches are founded in the belief that deaf children can learn to use their residual hearing (at whatever level that might be) well enough to develop good listening and speaking skills which will enable them to communicate and mix with hearing people as part of the wider hearing community. The underlying philosophy is also that oral language better supports the development of English literacy skills – reading and writing, because written language is built on an understanding of the sounds and structure of the spoken language.

**British Sign Language (BSL)** has its own distinct grammar. It is a visual spatial language using handshapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to convey meaning and to communicate. In addition, BSL has its own lip patterns distinct from those of English. Meanings can be changed via speed of hand or body movement and facial expression. Language is communicated simultaneously within a 3D space rather than sequentially.

There are regional differences in BSL in the same way that there are regional differences in spoken languages.

**Sign Bilingualism** uses sign language as the child's first language and the spoken language of the family is learned as a second language. A Sign Bilingual approach to developing communication is rooted in the belief that for deaf children to have full access to language learning, education, information and the world around them, together with a strong positive deaf identity, a visual language is essential rather than one which relies on hearing and speech. In terms of Sign Bilingualism, British Sign Language (BSL) is the language of the UK Deaf community and it is estimated that about 70,000 people use it as their first or preferred language.

**Total Communication** is more of a communication philosophy than an approach in itself. It uses a variety of methods flexibly – sign, speech and hearing, fingerspelling, gesture, facial expression and lipreading – in whatever combination works best for the deaf child. As such, there can be quite a lot of variation in how Total Communication is developed and used, but it is based on the principle that deaf children can learn to communicate effectively by using any and all means that they can.

**Sign Supported English or Signs Supporting English (SSE)** is a manual support system incorporating signs taken from BSL together with fingerspelling. It is used in English word order to supplement spoken words but does not attempt to present every element of the spoken utterance. It aims to clarify the spoken message and lessen ambiguity by using sign support.

Sources used:

Communicating with your deaf child. NDCS

Communication approaches, modes and methods currently in use in the education of deaf children and young people in the UK. British Association of Teachers of the Deaf

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