



One minute guide

Safeguarding deaf children and young people (those with hearing loss)

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Why is it important to safeguard deaf children?

It is important to safeguard all children and young people from harm. However, those with hearing loss are particularly vulnerable. For the purposes of this guide, the term deaf is used to apply to all those with hearing loss which might affect communication, interaction and development. Deafness is of varying degrees: mild; moderate; severe; and profound.

Deafness can significantly impede a child's ability to develop language and to communicate effectively. This can present a barrier to their social, emotional and intellectual development and impact on their ability to express their emotions, needs and concerns. This can make them particularly vulnerable to:

Social isolation and a lack of social opportunities;

Neglect, particularly where appropriate communication and language are not fostered and stimulated;

Abuse and bullying within the home and outside;

Social and emotional difficulties, poor self-esteem and mental health needs; and

Low levels of literacy and educational achievement.

When communicating with deaf children: this is best done in a quiet area and reduce any background noise; check understanding and be aware that they will be looking at your face expressions for visual cues to support their understanding; it is best when one person is speaking at a time; and to aid lip reading, avoid face obstructions i.e. masks / hands over the mouth, face the child, speak clearly and avoid bright lights or windows behind the speaker—which cast a shadow over them and the child cannot see their faces clearly.

What help is available to deaf children in Leeds

There is a range of help available to deaf children and young people in Leeds:

Teacher of the Deaf - Every deaf child will have an allocated Qualified Teacher of the Deaf (QToD). The QToD can advise on appropriate approaches to communicating with the child, and whether communication support is required. The QToD will have all background information, such as how the hearing loss is affecting the child, and which other practitioners are working with the child. Other key practitioners to contact may include the health visitor, audiologist, speech and language therapist and those in the early years setting.

Equipment—Deaf children are usually provided with hearing aids, and some are fitted with [cochlear implants](#). It is important that parents/carers and practitioners understand the implications, encourage their use, and take appropriate care of the devices. Deaf children can benefit from other equipment to enable them to participate in everyday life. All deaf children and young people can access a technology assessment from [Leeds Hearing and Sight Loss Service](#). This is run by the charity [BID Services](#).

Sign language—Access to British Sign Language will be important to many deaf children including those who also have access to spoken language. This includes those who have cochlear implants and who are learning spoken language. Families will often require support and encouragement to develop and use signing skills, as it requires significant ongoing commitment.

What should practitioners consider when working with deaf children?

When working with a deaf child or young person it is important to:

Seek advice from specialists, particularly the child's Teacher of the Deaf, and if appropriate, the speech and language therapist or other practitioners;

Check that the child is attending appropriate appointments e.g. audiology, as these are vital in their wellbeing and development;

Consider how the child is developing language and communication skills, and how well the family and others are providing the necessary support and framework for this;

Ensure that the child can communicate effectively with you, using sign language with professional interpretation where it is the child's preferred or strongest method;

Ensure that equipment needs are met and that they are being used and functioning well;

Check that the child has opportunities to socialise; and has access to other deaf children if they want this; and

Check that pre-school children have access to early learning opportunities and settings, and older children have access to activities out of school time.

What can practitioners do to support families?

Families of deaf children need to be proactive in helping their child develop language, and thrive however most families of deaf children have no prior experience of deafness. Parents may experience grief and anger, and may question their parenting skills. It is vital that deaf children can express their social and emotional wellbeing. Practitioners should support and challenge parents/carers to:

Form a strong bond with their deaf child from the earliest age;

Develop skills to communicate effectively with their child, whether through spoken language, sign or both;

Create an environment where communication helps their child develop language, social skills, cognitive abilities and to stay safe; and

Engage with health and education professionals with expertise to assess needs and help parents to address these.

Key practitioners should be involved in developing an [early help](#) plan, which will coordinate activities and improve outcomes for the child. If an early help plan does not achieve the desired outcomes for the child due to the high levels of support needed, or if there is a concern that the child is at risk of significant harm, then contact should be made with the [duty and advice team](#). When making the contact, it is important to emphasise that the child has a hearing loss, and to give details of practitioners who can give specialist advice.

Key contacts and for further information

Contact the Sensory Service, Deaf and Hearing Impairment Team (DAHIT) tel: 0113 37 82888 and Leeds Hearing and Sight Loss Service tel: 0113 288 5750 email: leedsinfo@bid.org.uk

You can contact the [National Deaf Children's Society \(NDCS\)](#) tel: 0808 800880 and advisory service tel: 0121 234825 and access their practitioners' [guide](#)

You can also watch the following videos about [Hearing Awareness](#), [Hearing and Balance Centre](#), and [Hearing Aid Self Help](#) from the NHS in Leeds.