

ncse

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta  
National Council for Special Education

# Information for Parents/Guardians of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Young People



## The early days...

Every year approximately 100 babies with permanent hearing loss are born in Ireland. The hearing loss can be in one ear only (unilateral) or in both ears (bilateral). The level of hearing loss can be mild, moderate, severe or profound.

### How do you find out if your baby or young child has a hearing loss?

Deafness or hearing loss in babies and young children is generally discovered through the child developmental checks carried out by the public health nurse on all Irish babies in the local health centre at 9 months, 18 months and two years of age.

A **hearing screening test** is being introduced into all Irish maternity hospitals and will soon be available to all babies born in Ireland (including home births and births in private hospitals). Some children acquire a permanent hearing loss sometime after birth. This could be due to genetics, trauma or childhood diseases (for example meningitis).

If you have any concerns about your child's hearing, for example, your baby does not respond to sounds, you should immediately raise these concerns with your public health nurse or with your GP.

## Getting support

If you discover that your child has a hearing loss you should immediately seek the support that is available to you. This support can come from family and friends; public health nurses and GPs; services for Deaf<sup>1</sup> children and voluntary organisations; your local visiting teacher for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children; and from other parents/guardians of Deaf or Hard of Hearing children.

Your child may be Deaf or Hard of Hearing but it is important to know that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children can lead good and fulfilling lives. They receive support in school and many achieve good outcomes and go on to further and higher education.

The most important action that you can take, as a parent, is to provide your child with early access to language: signed, spoken

---

1 The Irish Deaf Society (IDS) defines the Deaf community as a group of people who share a perception of the world through an emphasis on visual and kinaesthetic input. This description of 'Deaf' is most commonly used for people who are Deaf at birth or who become so in very early childhood. This definition identifies a cultural, social and linguistic group, and is often signified by the use of a capital 'D' (<http://www.Deaf.ie>). In this pamphlet, the term 'Deaf' is used to include all Deaf people.

or both. This is crucial for your child to achieve his/her potential. From the very beginning, it is important that you continue to communicate with your child as much as possible through facial expression, signing, speaking, and gestures. In these ways your child learns to communicate and develop language as early as possible in a natural setting. This early access to language is very important for your child's development and will greatly help later when they come to learn about reading, writing and numbers in school.

## **Educational services available to your child**

The education system supports your Deaf or Hard of Hearing child in the following ways:

### **Early intervention**

It is very important for young Deaf and Hard of Hearing children to receive support as early as possible in life. This will assist their general cognitive development and help them to develop a fluent language. This will make it easier for them to develop good literacy and numeracy skills later in their childhood. The State funds a free pre-school place for all eligible children in the year before they start school.

### **Visiting Teacher Service**

If your child is identified as having a significant hearing loss, your child will be referred to the Visiting Teacher Service which is provided by the Department of Education & Skills (DES). Visiting teachers work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and their families from the time the hearing loss is identified. They provide advice and support to parents and some teaching to pre-school children in the home. They place a special emphasis on language development, whether spoken or signed. They also provide some teaching to Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in schools and advice and support to their teachers. They monitor the educational progress your child is making both at pre-school and at school.

### **Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme**

The DES provides for Irish Sign Language tuition in the home to Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and their families. The visiting teacher can provide parents/guardians with full information about this scheme.

## Going to school

Most Deaf and Hard of Hearing children attend their local mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Some attend classes or schools for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. These classes are available at a number of mainstream primary and post-primary schools throughout the country. There are also three schools for Deaf children, two of which are based in Dublin and one in Limerick city. Classes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children have smaller numbers of children enrolled.

Your visiting teacher and your special educational needs organiser (SENO) can give you advice on pre-school and school placements for your child. Your child will be supported in school in the following ways:

- The classroom teacher supports children and young people with special educational needs and may adapt lessons or tasks to suit the individual, as necessary.
- Learning support or resource teachers are available to provide additional teaching support, if it is required.
- Access to support from special needs assistants (SNAs) is provided for pupils who have significant care needs arising from their hearing loss. SNAs are employed to look after the care needs of children while the teacher is responsible for teaching the child.
- Assistive Technology, for example, a sound field system or a personal FM system is provided, as necessary.
- A Special Transport Scheme is available for children with special educational needs who are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class or special school that can be resourced to meet their needs.



## Health services available to your child

The health system supports your Deaf or Hard of Hearing child in the following ways:

### Audiology

If there are any concerns about your child's hearing you will be referred to an **audiologist** who will carry out a hearing test. Your child's levels of hearing loss are represented on a graph known as an **audiogram**. This shows you how loud a sound has to be (measured in decibels ) and at what frequency/pitch before your child can hear it.

**Levels of hearing loss** are generally defined as:

Mild:	24 - 40 decibels
Moderate:	41 - 70 decibels
Severe:	71 - 95 decibels
Profound:	95+ decibels

*Source: HSE National Audiology Review, 2011*

The audiologist will assess if your child needs hearing aids and will advise on the best type of hearing aid. He/she will also select and fit suitable modern digital hearing aids and monitor your child's hearing to make sure that the hearing aids are suitable.

The audiologist may refer your child to an **ear, nose and throat consultant** who specialises in the diagnosis and medical and surgical treatment of ear, nose and throat conditions.

Your child may be referred for assessment for a **cochlear implant (CI)**. A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted electronic device that provides access to sound to a person with severe to profound hearing loss, although it does not restore a person's hearing in full.

Your child may be referred to a **developmental paediatrician** to assess how he/she is generally developing or to an **ophthalmologist** to check vision.

### Speech and Language Therapy

Deaf and Hard of Hearing children have an increased risk of experiencing difficulty in developing communication skills. They should be monitored by a speech and language therapist from an early age so that appropriate intervention, if necessary, can be provided in a timely manner. Speech and language therapists work in a variety of settings including community care centres, hospitals, schools, voluntary organisations etc.

## Useful contacts

Further information is available in the NCSE information booklet for parents/guardians ***Children with Special Educational Needs***, available from your local SENO or from the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

Contact details for your local SENO may be obtained from the school or from the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

You can obtain contact details for your local visiting teacher and details of the ISL support scheme from:

Special Education Section, Department of Education and Skills, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

Tel: 090 6484187 / 4166

Website: <http://www.education.ie>

Paediatric Cochlear Implant Programme: 01 809 2013

SMS: 087 953 5423. Email: [cochlearimplant@beaumont.ie](mailto:cochlearimplant@beaumont.ie)

Contact your local health centre for information on health services. Contact details are available at [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).

## Support organisations

**Catholic Institute for Deaf People:** <http://www.cidp.ie>

**DeafHear:** <http://www.deafhear.ie>

**Irish Deaf Society:** <http://www.irishdeafsociety.ie>

**Irish Hard of Hearing Association:** <http://www.ihha.ie>

**Irish Deaf – online:** <http://www.irishdeaf.com>

**Irish Deaf Kids:** <http://www.irishdeafkids.ie>

**Deaf Education Centre:** [www.deafeducation.ie](http://www.deafeducation.ie)

**Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College:**

<http://www.tcd.ie/slscs/cds>

**National Deaf Children's Society (UK):** <http://www.ndcs.org.uk>

**Sharing the Journey:** <http://www.sharingthejourney.ie>

*Please note that these organisations are listed only for information purposes. The National Council for Special Education may have had no involvement with these organisations, has no control over the information they provide and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Parents should always satisfy themselves regarding the appropriateness of providing any information concerning their child to any third-party.*

*The aim of this pamphlet is to inform parents and guardians of supports and services available for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and their families.*

## National Council for Special Education

1-2 Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath.

Tel: 046 948 6400 Web: [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie) Email: [info@ncse.ie](mailto:info@ncse.ie)