



COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS A-Z™

Education

1. What are the communication considerations in education?

All students need full access to all classroom communication and instruction. For children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) this situation needs careful attention because communication access can be compromised by poor classroom acoustics, inadequate lighting, teachers who have difficulty projecting their voices, children with little voices, and other classroom noise sources such as fish tanks, pencil sharpeners, overhead projectors, and ventilations systems. For children using sign language, an added barrier occurs if the sign language interpreter is not adequately skilled to fully interpret the instruction and dialogue within the classroom. Since young children's language skills are not fully developed, they have more difficulty filling in words and information that are not heard, missed or are left out. These gaps start an adverse cycle that impacts comprehension, attention, general knowledge, behavior and ultimately academic performance.

2. What issues are at the forefront of education for students who are DHH?

There are several; most urgent are that DHH children and youth have:

- Language skills that are commensurate with hearing peers so that they can benefit from general education classroom instruction. This requires early identification of hearing loss and effective interven-

tion services.

- Full access to communication and instruction through the use of specific accommodations that “level the playing field”.
- Frequent and consistent monitoring of their performance to assure that the learning trajectory illustrates one for one growth (e.g., one month’s growth in one month, one year’s growth in one year),
- High performance expectations from parents, teachers, service providers, and themselves that they can achieve the same as a peer without hearing loss.
- High quality specialized instruction and support services for students who have additional disabilities or other situations that result in performance delays.

3. What questions should every parent and professional ask about education for DHH?

- Is my child eligible for specialized services at school?
 - Children with a “hearing disability” may be eligible for special education support, but hearing loss alone is not a qualifying condition—the child must also need specialized instruction.
 - If a DHH child is identified early and has benefitted from effective early intervention, there may be no “adverse effect” of hearing loss that would qualify for special education support at school. Parents should become knowledgeable about their child’s unique needs and what it takes to meet them, and whether or not special education services are appropriate. Understanding special education as well as parental rights, applicable laws and regulations related to a DHH child’s education is essential.
- What is the accountability system in the school? Who is the special education director? What is the chain of command? What is the role of the school administrator? Who has day to day responsibility for the services? What is their level of knowledge and experience with DHH students?
 - Administrators should demonstrate that they are committed to supporting families and their children and be willing to advocate for their access needs and specialized services.
- How is the performance of DHH children assessed, monitored and adjusted?
 - In addition to academic areas, schools should consider non-academic areas such as speech, listening, social, and self-advocacy skills. Progress should be monitored frequently (that may mean weekly for many skills) and service adjustments made when progress expectations are not met. Parents should be kept informed of all progress monitoring results and any service adjustments that are made. Practices used in school should be based on research evidenced-based practices or consensus best practices for DHH children and youth.
 - In addition to individual student data, group performance data for DHH students should be analyzed, and monitored within the school, school district, or cooperative/regional program including performance on state and district-wide assessments.
- What are the options for services and programming? How are educational placement decisions

made? How are communication considerations under special education law/the IDEA discussed and incorporated into the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP)? What related services are available (e.g., audiology, counseling, interpreting/captioning, parent, training and counseling, speech-language)? What specialized instruction is available (e.g., self-advocacy training, listening skill training, deaf culture, transition preparation)?

- o There should be a continuum of services and placement options that are discussed for each child. Placement decisions should never be made on what is available. The IEP team may need to be creative to design the right program for your child.
- o School performance should be one of the primary factors to determine placement and services. However, non-academic factors are also important. Other considerations include access to other DHH peers, opportunities for participation in extra-curricular activities, and the need for specialized instruction and support services.

4. Where can I go for more information on education?

- U.S. Department of Education and No Child Left Behind: www.ed.gov/nclb
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html
- Hands & Voices Special Education Eligibility Survival Guide: http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/education/advocacy/V11-2_eligibSurvKit.html
- www.wrightslaw.com

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Communication Considerations A to Z™ is a series from Hands & Voices that's designed to help families and the professionals working with them access information and further resources to assist them in raising and educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We've recruited some of the best in the business to share their insights on the many diverse considerations that play into communication modes & methods, and so many other variables that are part of informed decision making. We hope you find the time to read them all!