



Hear Our Voices

How to Have a Winning Year Teaching the Student Who Is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

To the Teacher:

This pamphlet was written for teachers who have a student with hearing loss in the classroom. The information presented here is based on the premise that in order for a student with a hearing loss to have a successful mainstream experience, all aspects of school life must be considered, and the whole school must be involved. To make mainstreaming work, you will need extra support and training as well as time to work with support staff. Most critically, you should be prepared to partner closely with the student's parents.

About Your Student:

When you hear the word "deaf", you may immediately think of someone who uses sign language; however, the student we are talking about in this brochure is one who communicates mainly by speaking, speechreading, and using his/her residual hearing through the use of technology— either hearing aids or a cochlear implant.

Getting a Head Start

Preparation is the key to a smoothly running year. If you have not had a child with hearing loss in your classroom before, it is vital for the school system to provide you with in-service training on the implications of hearing loss and the special needs your student may have as a result. This in-service training must be done before school begins. If your school has not had a mainstreamed student before, the staff should be put in contact with other schools that have students with hearing loss in order to learn from their experiences. A teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing can help you modify class materials and assist in planning lessons.

Creating the Right Atmosphere

Creating an atmosphere conducive to mainstreaming is crucial. Classroom teachers, parents, and itinerant staff such as speech-language pathologists, educational psychologists and resource teachers must work together to create a practical system of classroom organization and management. Ideas to consider in the classroom include:

- Developing a lesson on hearing loss to educate and prepare students
- Establishing a "secret signal" with your student to use when he/she does not understand something you've said

Your Student

Before your student starts school, try to meet and work with him/her a few times in order to identify social and academic strengths and weaknesses. This will also give you an opportunity to get comfortable with one another. Through involvement with key professionals you should already be aware of the student's degree of hearing loss and its implication and effect on his/her language, speech and general academic ability.

A wide variety of support services should be offered to the student, including but not limited to: a teacher of the hearing impaired, an oral interpreter, captioning, tutoring, speech therapy, and/or notetakers. Decisions about services will have taken place in your student's IEP discussion and should have been clearly communicated to you. The entire staff—including gym/music teachers, bus drivers and cafeteria workers—should be well informed of the needs of the student even though they may interact with him/her

only on a limited basis. It is vital that the staff promote an atmosphere of encouragement, acceptance and respect in which all students can thrive!

Hearing Technology

Hearing Aids—The student with hearing loss usually wears two hearing aids that fit behind the ear (BTE). Hearing aids are tiny devices that amplify sound for the wearer. In these aids, the microphone, amplifier, and receiver are contained in a small case and are connected to an earmold that fits in the ear canal. Hearing aids do not correct a hearing loss but, rather, make sounds louder. They work best in quiet settings within close range of the speaker. The efficiency of hearing aids deteriorates rapidly once you are more than three feet from the hearing aid user and/or in a noisy environment.

The student should always have spare hearing aid batteries with him/her but it would also be advisable to ask the parents or audiologist for a supply yourself.

Cochlear Implants—A student with a severe-to-profound hearing loss may wear an implanted electronic device called a cochlear implant, instead of hearing aids. A cochlear implant electronically sorts out useful sounds and transforms them into electrical impulses. Then, these electrical impulses are delivered directly to the nerve that conducts them to the brain. Increasingly, cochlear implants are used to give people with severe to profound hearing loss access to enough sound to comprehend speech without speechreading.

Once again, the student should always have a spare battery for his/her cochlear implant speech processor but it would also be advisable to ask the parents or audiologist for a supply yourself.

Assistive Listening Devices—Technologies that work in conjunction with a student's hearing aids or cochlear implant and that help him/her hear better in the classroom are called assistive listening devices. Two of the more popular ALDs are listed below. **Personal FM Systems**— Personal FMs work on radio waves and deliver speech directly from a microphone worn by the teacher to the student's ears. This eliminates background noise, and provides the clearest and most consistent pattern of the teacher's voice. The FM microphone should always be placed next to the sound source (e.g., other students or a TV) when the teacher is not talking. For ease of management, you should have a second microphone for this purpose.

Soundfield FM Systems—A soundfield FM system is essentially a classroom public address system in which speech is picked up via an FM wireless microphone located near the teacher's mouth. This signal is amplified and conveyed to the classroom via one or more strategically placed speakers. A benefit of soundfield systems is that the entire class benefits from greater clarity of sound and reduced background noise. The drawback, for the child with hearing loss, is that the sound is not as clear or as loud as it would be with a personal FM.

If you will be using assistive technology in the classroom, be sure you understand how it works and its purpose vis-à-vis your student. Try it out yourself so you can experience the benefit it provides. Finally, make sure that technical support is available for the student's FM system. Breakdowns do occur, and audiological support is essential.

The Classroom Environment

Your student's hearing aids (or cochlear implant) amplify all sounds, including background noise. Therefore, noises such as heating and ventilation clicks and whirs, moving furniture, chairs scraping against tile, shuffling feet and noise "bleed" from busy roads outside should be eliminated as much as possible. Minimizing noise in the classroom can be accomplished by making relatively minor acoustical modifications, such as:

- Putting pads on chair, table and desk legs to reduce noise
- Installing carpeting in the classroom

- Installing double-paned windows
- Installing the highest-rated acoustical ceiling tile
- Ensuring that heating/ventilation systems are operating properly

Additionally, good lighting is essential for speechreading. Stand where light is good but not too strong. Natural light is best.

The student should be seated near the front and side of the classroom so that he/she can easily see you, but also see the other students. A semi-circle works well if the class is small. If the class is mostly lecture, the student needs to be close to the place where you are located. If there is a lot of group discussion, the student should be seated in the middle.

Work hard to avoid speaking while you're writing on the blackboard. Students with hearing loss can't read your lips with your back turned!

Difficult Situations for the Student with Hearing Impairment

The following situations provide a challenge to the student who is hearing impaired:

- **Listening to Instructions**—It is easy for a student with hearing loss to misinterpret instructions given orally. Writing out instructions on the blackboard will prevent misunderstandings. It would also be a good idea to outline the day's work on the blackboard. When students have to look at materials like maps and books and simultaneously listen to what you are saying, they miss some of the learning points from both. Appoint three or four peers to act as "buddies" to take turns assisting the student and sharing class notes.
- **Dictation and Spelling Tests**—The student with hearing loss cannot speechread and write at the same time. You can read the words slowly and give words in sentences to provide some context for the word being tested.
- **Reading Lessons**—If lessons are read aloud, it is hard for the student to locate the reader and follow the text. A solution is to ask a "buddy" to identify the reader and point to the text passage for the student with hearing loss.
- **Lessons Using Television or Slide Projectors**—It is impossible to speechread in a darkened room and when noise from machines masks your voice. Instead, select a captioned educational video from the many available to supplement your lesson. Contact AG Bell to learn of sources for captioned educational videos.
- **Lessons Using Tape Recorders with Language Lessons**—Provide a transcript of the tape or, better yet, try to present the material some other way.
- **Introducing New Topics**—Difficulty in following your lecture and classroom conversation may be eased by writing technical terms or new vocabulary on the board.
- **Standardized Examinations**—Standardized testing in large halls typically results in instructions and "time remaining" announcements being made by public address system. This makes following directions very difficult for a student with hearing loss. Notify the exam boards ahead of time that a candidate who is hearing impaired will be taking the exam so the proctors can accommodate him/her.

Conclusion

Adding commitment, creativity and enthusiasm to the ideas in this brochure will result in an educational environment that welcomes successful mainstreaming. If you make the classroom accessible to a student with hearing loss, you will not only provide this child with a more enriching education but—by

fostering an atmosphere of openness, acceptance and sensitivity to others— you will be creating a better place for all children to learn.

If you would like additional information, contact AG Bell Publications at www.agbell.org or 202-337-5220 (V) / 202-337-5221 (TTY) to order the following resources.

Show & Tell: Explaining Hearing Loss to Teachers by Clarke School for the Deaf

This classic videotape introduces mainstream teachers to the communication challenges experienced by students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and includes five simulations that show how the senses are affected at various levels of hearing loss.

Questions Teachers Ask: A Guide for the Mainstream Classroom Teacher with a Hearing-Impaired Student by Julie Winslow and Victoria J. Kozak

This clear and concise guide offers the essentials to mainstream teachers: information on hearing aid care, cochlear implants and FM systems, as well as helpful tips on assisting students with hearing loss succeed in the mainstream environment.

A Child with Hearing Loss in Your Classroom? Don't Panic! By Amanda Mangiardi

Designed for the mainstream teacher who has never taught a student with hearing loss, this booklet discusses the educational needs of these special students including: IEP maintenance, acoustics, ideas for teaching modifications and more.