



# The hearing impaired child in the classroom

The terms *hard of hearing*, *deaf* and *hearing impaired* cover a wide range of conditions which affect a child's listening ability and therefore interferes with their educational and social development.

## Two types of hearing loss

### 1. Conductive

This is caused by problems in the outer or middle ear which prevent the sound from being "conducted" to the inner ear and hearing nerves. The hearing may fluctuate and may affect one or both ears to varying degrees.

Conductive problems generally affects the *quantity* (loudness only) of the sound that is heard. It is usually medically or surgically treatable.

A common cause of conductive loss in children is middle ear infections.

### 2. Sensorineural

This type of hearing loss is due to a problem in the cochlea (the *sensory* part of the ear) or the hearing nerve (the *neural* part). It can be acquired or be present at birth. There is usually a loss of clarity as well as loudness i.e. the *quality* and the *quantity* of the sound is affected.

NOTE: It is possible to have both a conductive *and* a sensorineural hearing loss. This type of loss is called a **mixed hearing loss**.

## Unilateral vs bilateral

### Unilateral hearing loss...

- Only one ear affected.
- Causes great difficulty in hearing in background noise.
- Makes localising the source of a sound very difficult (important for road safety).

### Bilateral hearing loss...

- Both ears are affected.
- In addition to hearing speech at reduced loudness levels, bilateral sensorineural hearing losses can cause the sounds to be distorted. Putting sounds together meaningfully can be a difficult task.
- Medical intervention is not usually possible and the loss is permanent.
- Hearing aids are frequently fitted to assist the child to hear, depending on the degree of hearing loss.

## Support strategies

The following suggestions may help teachers overcome some of the difficulties hearing impaired children typically experience in the classroom situation.

### ◆ Seating

- Seat the hearing impaired student close to the teacher for the best sound reception and visual information. However, don't restrict them to only one location. Allow the student to move to a better listening position if they wish.
- Check the student has a clear view of the whole class for participation in group activities if possible.
- If one ear is better than the other, ensure the better ear is directed to class and teacher.
- Seat the student away from noisy areas.

*It may be necessary to change the seating arrangements for particular activities.*

### ◆ Visual supplements

- Ensure good lighting on your face. The glare of strong lighting (such as a window) behind the speaker makes lip reading difficult.



- Speak clearly but naturally; exaggeration or shouting can make it more difficult for the child to understand speech.
- Try to remain in one area while talking. It's difficult to lip read someone moving about a lot.
- Don't talk while your back is turned to the child (eg. writing on blackboard).
- Try to use as many visual aids as possible.
- When reading aloud, try not to let the book cover your face.

### ◆ Attention

Make sure the hearing impaired student is attending (not just listening) when you begin new work, when you ask a question, or when you give out a job.

### ◆ Feedback

Check that the student has understood instructions, eg. by repeating what was just said.

### ◆ Buddy system

It may be helpful to have a responsible peer share their notes with the hearing impaired student and to fill the student in when some direction or discussion is missed.

### ◆ Background noise

People with a hearing impairment cannot block out background noise like hearing people can.

Take steps to reduce the amount of noise in the classroom, such as minimising movement around the class and encouraging the students to be quiet during important teaching times. Try to seat the student away from noise (eg. a noisy child or open window).

### ◆ Preparation

Reading ahead on a topic or some other form of preparation will allow the hearing impaired student to "tune into" the subject and follow discussion more easily.

### ◆ Rephrasing

If the student did not understand, try saying the same thing another way. Encourage the student to admit when they don't understand, as many will be reluctant to do so.

### ◆ Inattention

Don't expect continuous attention on the hearing impaired student's part. Remember, they have to work harder to listen than their normal hearing peers and the concentration required to hear can be very tiring.

### ◆ Socialisation

Watch the socialisation of the hearing impaired student with their peers. Encourage a positive acceptance of the student by other children.

### ◆ Hearing aid care

Support the use of hearing aids or other listening systems that may be used. Routinely check they are being worn as recommended and that they are working correctly.

## Australian Hearing support for teachers

If the child wears a hearing aid, they will be under the care of an Australian Hearing Audiologist who is there to offer support and advice to teachers. The Audiologist can help you understand the child's hearing loss and aided ability, explain how to best communicate with the student, discuss hearing aids and other devices which help them hear, provide inservice training and informative reports.

**If you would like advice or more information, call 131 797 to be connected to your local Australian Hearing centre.**

**AUSTRALIAN HEARING provides the best hearing care, the latest in hearing aid technology and leads the world in hearing research.**

*If you would like more information, ring 13 17 97 to be connected to your nearest AUSTRALIAN HEARING Centre, or visit our website on [www.hearing.com.au](http://www.hearing.com.au)*