

# The Spirit of Sound

## Educators' Guide



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Written by Hearing Australia and ECTARC

Original artwork by Davinder Hart and supplemented illustrations by Hearing Australia

**Acknowledgement**

Hearing Australia acknowledges the early education services who have used The Spirit of Sound storybook and shared their experiences to help create this educator guide.







# Contents

Introduction	1
The story behind the artwork	2
The Spirit of Sound key messages	3
The Spirit of Sound and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) V2.0	4
Stages of auditory development	5
Sharing The Spirit of Sound storybook with children	6
Sound based learning experiences	7
• Dialogic reading	
• Listening to the land	
• Clapsticks	
• What's that sound?	
Moving forward: keeping The Spirit of Sound alive in your service	14
Supporting resources	14
Appendix	15

## Introduction

# What is The Spirit of Sound?

Hearing Australia has proudly partnered with Noongar artist Davinder Hart to create *The Spirit of Sound* storybook. The storybook highlights the importance of hearing and sound through cultural traditions and connections.

The storybook is designed to support parents, carers and educators to engage with children on the sounds they can hear. It also helps raise awareness about how sound and hearing support children's development in their early years.

### About the artist - Davinder Hart

Davinder Hart is an Aboriginal artist from Perth, Western Australia. His family roots connect from Bibbulmun and Katanning in the southwest region of the Noongar Nation.

Davinder shares stories through his art. He uses knowledge passed down from his uncles and aunties.







I encourage everyone to care for and value their hearing and to reach out if you need help so you can celebrate the joy of sound and stay connected to your loved ones and what matters most.

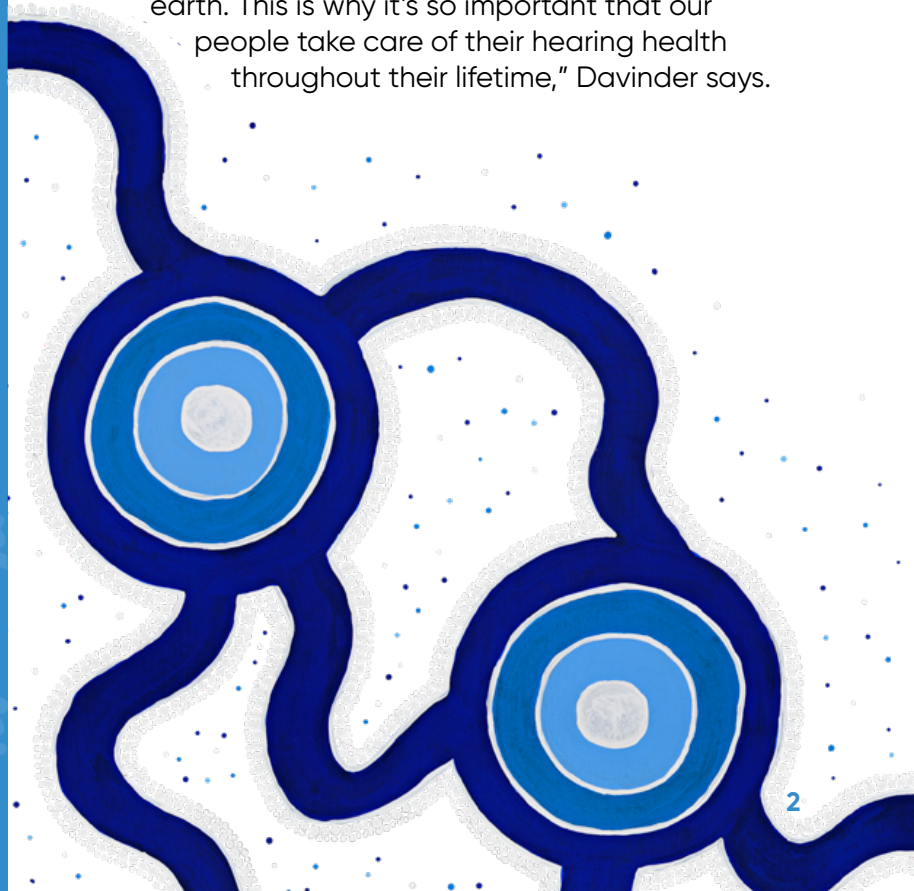
# The story behind the artwork

The Spirit of Sound artwork is made up of three circles which represent Music, Dance and Mother Earth.

"Sound is so important to myself and to Indigenous people," says Davinder.

"Hearing the sounds of the didge, clap sticks and the thump of feet dancing in time and feeling it vibrate through the ground, it transcends the physical and evokes a feeling deep down in my soul of belonging. It is an echo of my ancestors flowing through time and telling the stories of my people.

Sound is a way of sharing and passing down knowledge from generation to generation to ensure the survival of a culture deeply connected to the earth. This is why it's so important that our people take care of their hearing health throughout their lifetime," Davinder says.



# The Spirit of Sound key messages

The Spirit of Sound key messages are adapted from Davinder Hart's message 'when children start to listen, they can start to learn'.

## We can learn through sound

Children use sound to explore, communicate, and make sense of their world. Listening activities, music, and storytelling all support early learning.

## We can connect to culture through sound

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, sound plays a vital role in sharing knowledge, history and traditions. Clapsticks, songs and Dreamtime stories help keep culture alive.

## Can you hear the spirit of sound?

By listening closely to the land, to each other, and to the sounds around us, we can develop a deeper appreciation for the world and our place in it.

# Sound and hearing is important

Hearing and listening are fundamental for the development of oral language. Children learn language through listening to the sounds around them. If a child cannot hear these sounds they may have challenges with developing spoken language, reading and writing.

Hearing Australia found that nearly 30% of children aged 5 years old experienced hearing loss at a point of time.

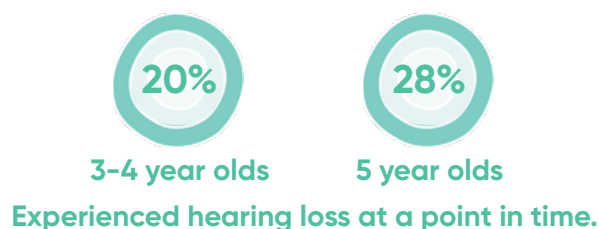


Figure 1. Hearing loss assessed by the Hearing Assessment Program Early Ears (AIHW 2024).

Finding hearing loss early helps children learn to speak and understand language at the right age. This guide gives you simple ways to support hearing and language development in all children. It also shows why sound is important for learning and growing.

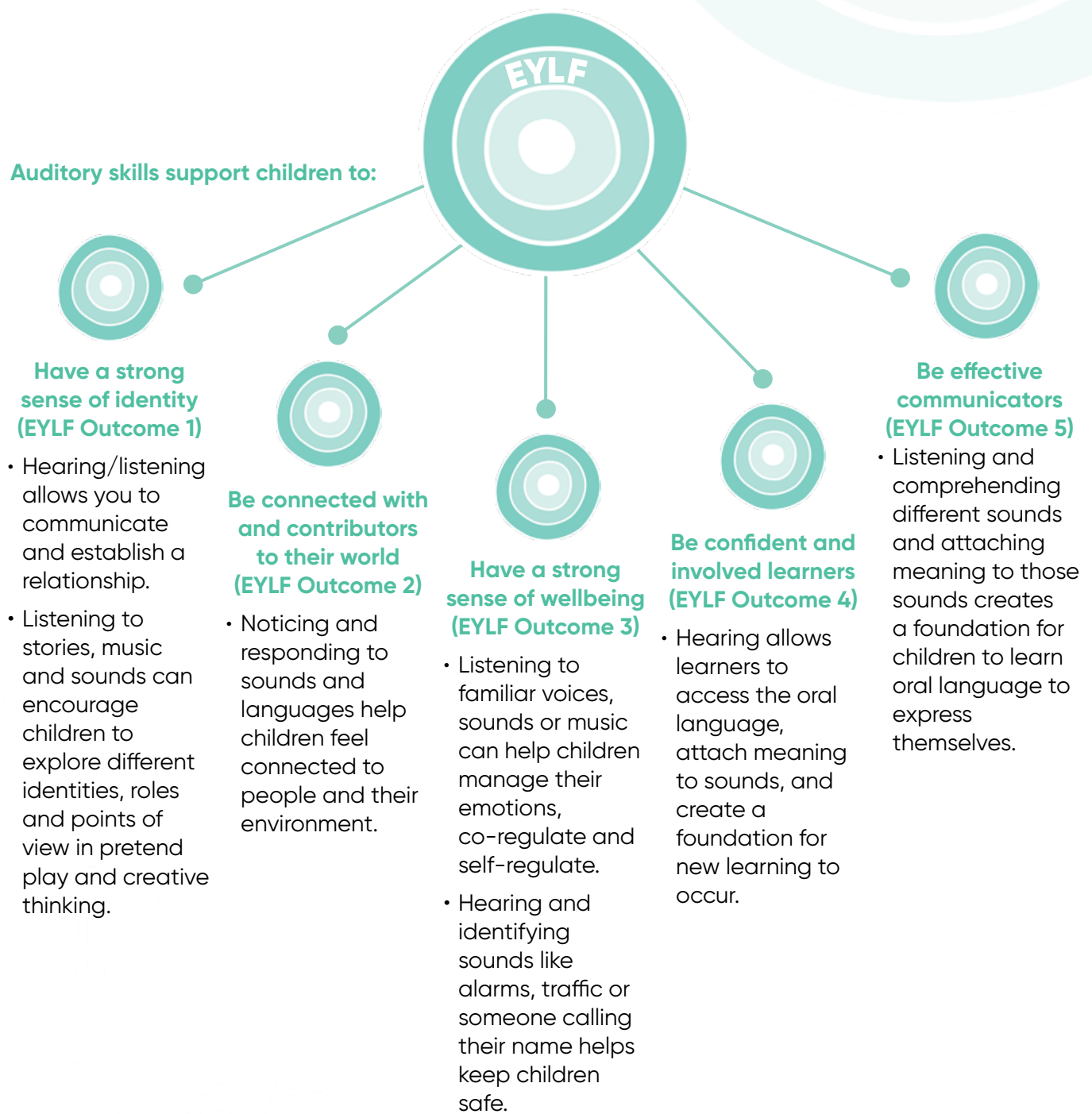
# The Spirit of Sound and the National Quality Standard (NQS)

The Spirit of Sound and its key messages on ear health align with the National Quality Standard (NQS), particularly in:

- Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
- Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
- Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
- Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.



# The Spirit of Sound and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) V2.0



**Figure 2.** Auditory skills and the Early Years Learning Framework. Experiences that focus on auditory skills are also valuable opportunities for educators to notice indicators of potential hearing loss.

See appendix 1 for more information.

# Stages of auditory development

Auditory development is the process of how children learn to hear, listen, and make sense of sounds. Understanding the stages of auditory development helps educators to support children's learning more effectively. These stages can be thought of as rungs on a ladder, from bottom to top, where each step represents an important auditory skill. As children develop, they progress from noticing sounds (sound detection) to understanding the meaning of sounds (comprehension). As you can see below, each auditory skill builds the foundation for the next.

## Sound detection

Sound detection is the ability to know when a sound is present or not. For example, a child hears their name being called and knows there is a sound. Educators may observe the child turning their eyes or head toward the sound.

## Sound discrimination

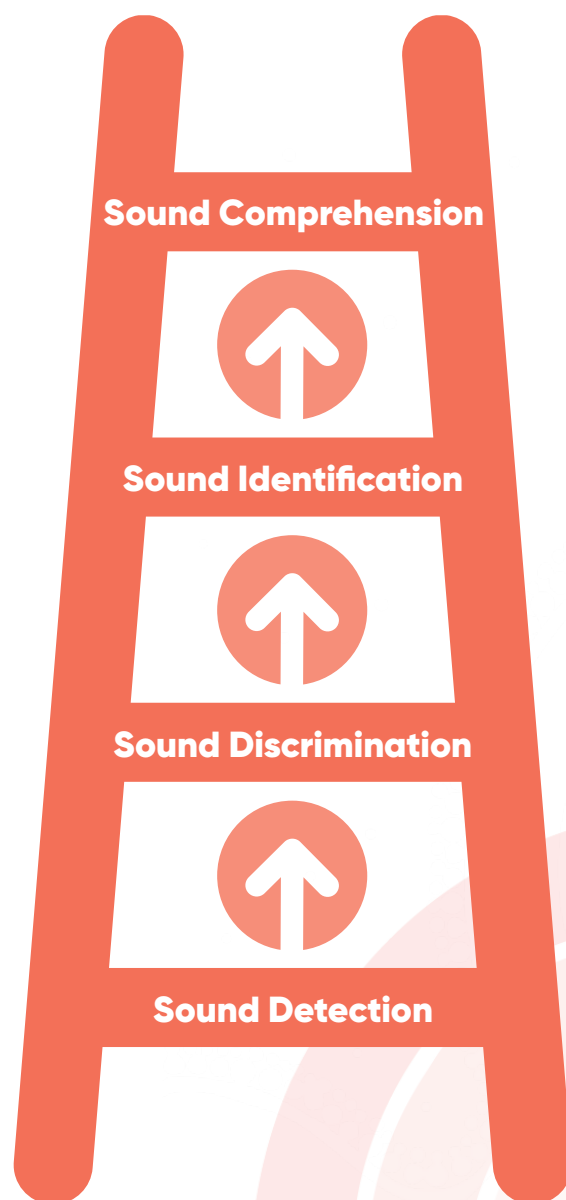
Sound discrimination is the ability to determine whether two sounds are the same or different. For example, a child hears "Jess" and "Jen" being called and notices that there are two sounds.

## Sound identification

Sound identification is the ability to identify or label a sound. For example, a child who hears their name being called can tell that it is their name and not the name of their peer.

## Sound comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand the meaning of sounds. For example, A child hears their name being called and raises their hand and says, "I am here".



**Figure 3.** Stages of auditory development, adapted from Clark Schools for Hearing and Speech, 2023.



# Sharing The Spirit of Sound storybook with children



The Spirit of Sound storybook shows how sound connects to culture, belonging, and nature. You can use this guide in many ways to support children's learning and wellbeing in early education.

In the next pages, you'll find simple ideas to help you use the storybook to start conversations, spark learning, and engage children of all ages.



# Learning experience

## Dialogic reading

Dialogic reading is a way of reading with children that encourages talking and thinking together. It helps build language and thinking skills through simple back-and-forth conversations.

The questions below can help children learn new words. They support both receptive vocabulary (words children understand) and expressive vocabulary (words children use). These questions are based on Marion Blank's Levels of Questioning (MBL). This model is used in education and speech therapy to group questions from easy to more complex.

Use these questions while reading *The Spirit of Sound* to start meaningful conversations and help children explore how sound connects to culture and community.



Pages 6 & 7 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

Where are the clapsticks?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What do you think the clapsticks sound like?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

Why do you think the spirit of sound is important to the people in the story?



Pages 8 & 9 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

Can you find the babies?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What do the babies hear inside Mummy's tummy?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

What sounds make you feel safe? Why do you think the spirit of sound makes babies feel safe?



Page 10 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

What animal is called Bunda?  
Can you point to the Bunda?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What are the two animals called?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

What are the two animals named in the story, and how are they different?





Page 12 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

Who sings songs to the baby?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What makes the crackling sound?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

What sounds make babies feel safe?



Page 13 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

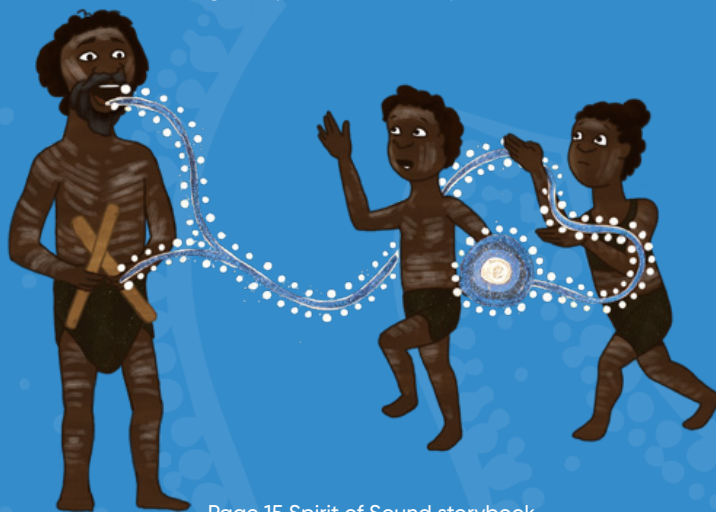
Can you point to the emu?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What does the emu look like?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

Why do you think the elders use sound when telling stories?



Page 15 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

What is making the musical sounds?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What sounds do we hear when people dance on the land?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

How do you feel when you dance or hear music?



Page 17 Spirit of Sound storybook

Birth to 2 years (MBL 1)

Who is at the dance?

Birth to 2 - 3 years (MBL 2)

What sounds do you hear when people come together to celebrate?

3 - 5 years (MBL 3 & 4)

How do sounds help people feel connected to each other and the land?



## Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V2.0

### OUTCOME 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children develop language and communication skills by asking and answering questions during shared reading and story discussions.

### Encouraging further engagement

Educators can deepen children's involvement and learning by:

- Placing a hand to their ear and pausing to 'listen' during key moments in the story, such as when it asks, "Can you hear the spirit of sound?", and encouraging children to do the same, allowing time for children to identify any sounds they can hear.
- Using actions or props to recreate sounds described in the story, like:
  - stomping feet
  - clapping hands
  - drumming a heartbeat
  - scrunching items such as leaves, twigs, bark, foil or cellophane to make crackling fire sounds.
- Asking children to close their eyes and identify the sound being made.
- Emphasising rhyming sounds whilst reading. Once children become familiar with the story, encourage them to complete sentences using the rhyming word. For example, "Have you heard the spirit of sound? Listen closely, it's all...around!"



# Learning experience

## Listening to the land

Take small groups of children on a listening walk outdoors. Encourage them to close their eyes and focus on the sounds around them. Ask them to name the sounds they can hear in nature (sound identification).

During the walk, acknowledge the deep connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the land and its sounds.



### Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V2.0

#### OUTCOME 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children develop respect for the natural environment.

#### OUTCOME 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children build sensory awareness and curiosity as they detect sounds in their environment through intentional listening.

#### OUTCOME 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children strengthen listening and comprehension skills, which are essential for early literacy development.
- Children build language and expressive vocabulary by verbally labelling the sounds they hear.

Deepen this experience and opportunities for learning by:

- using language and tone that encourages engagement and curiosity. For example, use a whispering voice: "listen carefully. Can you hear the spirit of sound? What sounds is it making in this moment?" (**sound identification**)
- noticing sounds in the distance. Noticing closer sounds (**sound detection**)
- encouraging the children to describe or mimic the sounds they hear (**sound identification**)
- encouraging children to listen carefully during moments of silence, and noticing if they hear a sound (e.g. could be the sound of their own breathing or someone else making a sound) (**sound detection**)
- encouraging children to distinguish between natural sounds and man-made sounds (**sound identification**)
- encouraging children to identify whether two sounds are the same or different (**sound discrimination**)
- encouraging children to match sounds to pre-prepared images such as birds, trees, wind, cars, etc. (**sound identification**)
- encouraging children to act out sounds that they hear, e.g. birds, trees, wind, car, etc. (**sound comprehension**).

# Learning experience

## Clapsticks

Introduce children to one or more sets of clapsticks. Show them how to use the clapsticks to make different sounds. Explore simple musical concepts together, such as fast and slow, loud and soft.

Support children's auditory development by:

### 1. Move and freeze

Ask children to move around the space when you play the clapsticks and freeze when you stop playing. This helps children practice sound detection – listening for when a sound starts and stops.

### 2. Sound matching

Make different sounds by playing two or more sets of clapsticks in different ways. For example, play one set fast and one set slow, or play one set loudly and one set softly.

- Play one set and ask children to listen carefully.
- Then ask: "Was that sound from set 1 or set 2."
- This helps children discriminate between sounds.



## Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V2.0

### OUTCOME 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children explore cultural traditions and deepen their understanding of diversity by engaging with clapsticks, a traditional instrument used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for storytelling, music, and ceremony.

Deepen the experience and opportunities for children's learning by:

- Encouraging children to move differently to loud and soft sounds.
- Clapping a simple rhythm and asking children to repeat it. Try it with a more complex rhythm.
- Asking children to stomp in time with the clapsticks (whilst demonstrating and role-modelling).
- Moving around the room whilst playing the clapsticks – children close their eyes and point to where the sound is coming from.
- Using clapsticks to clap out syllables from words in the book. E.g. An-ces-tors, ba-by, spi-rit, kan-ga-roo, e-mu, etc.
- Inviting children to play and move to the sound of different instruments such as tambourines, drums, shakers and/or bells.



## Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V2.0

### OUTCOME 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children strengthen their language skills, such as listening and responding, by exploring beat, rhythm, and volume through music and movement.

# Learning experience

## What's that sound?

Create opportunities for children to listen to a variety of sounds and identify them by either naming the sound or matching it to images.

This activity can be adapted to suit different ages, developmental stages, and interests.

Here are some examples:

### 1. Animal sounds from the story

Play recordings of animals mentioned in *The Spirit of Sound*, such as:

- Bunda the kangaroo – strong, fast, and quick.
- Dinahwan the emu – graceful and slick.
- Provide pictures of each animal for children to choose from as they listen.
- Support language development by asking questions like:
  - “What makes you think that is the kangaroo?”
  - “What other animals are strong, fast, and quick?”
  - “What does ‘graceful’ mean?”
  - “Can you think of other animals that are graceful?”

### 2. General animal sounds

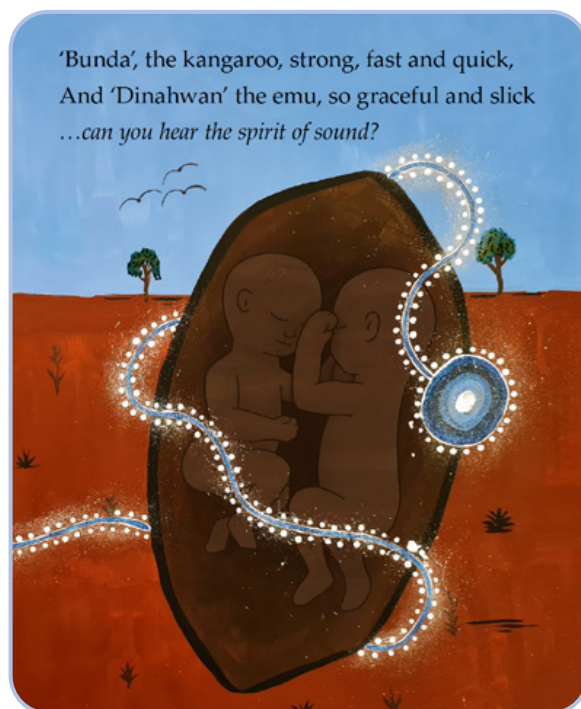
Play or make a variety of animal sounds.

- Ask children to identify the animals either by speaking or by choosing from provided images.
- Encourage discussion about the sounds to build vocabulary.

### 3. Everyday and nature sounds

Play recordings of familiar sounds, such as a doorbell or water running:

- Ask children to identify the sounds using words, pictures, or objects.
- Support language development through guided discussion.



*'Bunda', the kangaroo, strong, fast and quick,  
And 'Dinahwan' the emu, so graceful and slick  
...can you hear the spirit of sound?*



#### 4. Record and reflect

Invite children to record sounds they hear in their environment. Play the recordings back and ask:

- "What do you think that sound is?"
- "Did anyone record the same sound?"
- Use this as a chance to talk about sound and build descriptive language.



#### 5. Sound and movement game

Tell a small group of children you will play sounds from the story such as stomping, clapsticks, a beating heart, singing, and a crackling fire:

- Place matching images around the room and briefly explain each one.
- When a sound plays, children listen carefully and walk to the image that matches it.



### Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V2.0

#### **OUTCOME 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world**

- Children use play to explore characteristics of different animals, nature and cultural elements of sounds linked to The Spirit of Sound.

#### **OUTCOME 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**

- Children develop sensory awareness and focus through active listening games.

#### **OUTCOME 4: Children are confident and involved learners**

- Children engage in inquiry and problem-solving when identifying and matching sounds.
- Children show curiosity and use listening, memory, and observation skills to make connections between sounds and images.

# Moving forward

## Keeping The Spirit of Sound alive in your service

As explored throughout this resource, The Spirit of Sound can spark rich conversations and meaningful experiences that highlight the importance of sound in children's learning, development, and wellbeing.

How this looks in practice will vary across education and care settings, as educators adapt experiences to reflect the unique culture and context of their communities.

Ideas to keep The Spirit of Sound alive in your service:

- Display the book and fact sheets in your parent library.
- Encourage families to borrow the book and share it with their children at home.
- Read and discuss Davinder Hart's acknowledgement (at the beginning of the book) with children.
- Invite children to express The Spirit of Sound. Offer a variety of materials such as watercolours, paint, chalk, pencils, charcoal, or clay.
- Share and explore Dreamtime stories, such as The Emu in the Sky, and talk about their meaning.

As you continue to explore The Spirit of Sound in your setting, take time to reflect:

- How does sound shape children's understanding of themselves, others, and the world?
- What sounds are meaningful in your community?
- How can sound deepen cultural connections, spark curiosity, and strengthen relationships in your learning environment?

I would like to acknowledge that this Earth is my mother.

I acknowledge that Biami is my father that lives in the sky and acknowledge everything in between as my brother and sister. I am connected to everything, and I have a responsibility and obligation to look after this place.

*Davinder Hart*

## Supporting resources

The Spirit of Sound Toolkit can be found on the Hearing Australia website. It includes videos featuring well-known personalities, such as Luke Carroll and Emma Donovan, reading The Spirit of Sound. You will also find:

- The Spirit of Sound eBook.
- The Spirit of Sound Stakeholder Toolkit.
- The Spirit of Sound Media Release.
- The Spirit of Sound Posters.
- The Spirit of Sound Social Tiles.
- The Spirit of Sound Colouring in pages.

[hearing.com.au/first-nations-services/resources/](https://hearing.com.au/first-nations-services/resources/)



# APPENDIX 1

## Signs and symptoms of hearing loss

Educators should be alert to potential signs of hearing loss in children. These may include (but are not limited to):

**Using an unusually loud or soft speaking voice:** Children will speak louder or softer than other children as they can't hear themselves well.

**Watching and imitating other children:** Children who do not hear instructions well may rely on copying others to understand what to do.

**Not participating in listening activities (e.g., story time or singing):** Children may not hear the activity clearly and therefore may not engage or join in.

**Misunderstanding in noisy environments:** A child may follow instructions when close and it is quiet, but struggle to respond or understand when background noise is present.

**Tiring easily:** Children may become tired because hearing and listening require extra effort.

**Behaviour:** Children may show signs of frustration through their behaviour.

If you have concerns about a child's hearing, speak to your supervisor. Families should be encouraged to consult a General Practitioner (GP) for professional advice and referral.

If you have any questions about ear health and hearing, contact Hearing Australia's First Nations Services:



1300 253 655



[FirstNations@hearing.com.au](mailto:FirstNations@hearing.com.au)







For more information, contact Hearing Australia's First Nations Services



1300 253 655



FirstNations@hearing.com.au



hearing.com.au



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