



**How to make your resources  
accessible to deaf children  
and young people**







## How to make your resources accessible to deaf children and young people

There are more than 50,000 deaf children and young people in the UK, and four more babies are born deaf every day. Many of these children will want to access your information.

It's important for your organisation to think carefully about the needs of your audience so that they can get the most out of what you're offering. Some children and young people, including those who are deaf<sup>1</sup>, will have difficulty accessing your information.

We've created this factsheet to help you make your information accessible to deaf children and young people. Our suggestions will also help make your content more engaging and useful for other children and young people.

**The National Deaf Children's Society uses the word 'deaf' to refer to all levels of hearing loss. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss, such as glue ear.**



## What does it mean to be deaf?

With the right support, deaf children and young people can do anything other children can do. However, if the right support is not provided early on, childhood deafness may impact on a range of skills that children need to learn, including language development, literacy skills and incidental learning (such as learning by overhearing others).

Delayed access to language, whether spoken or signed, can lead to delays in a child's social, emotional and intellectual development.

**As the reading age of many deaf children is still substantially lower than hearing children of the same age, you will need to think of the best possible way to get information to them.**

<sup>1</sup>For information on how to make your content accessible to deafblind children, please contact Sense: [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk)



## How do deaf children and young people communicate?

A deaf child may use one or more of the communication methods described below. Their chosen communication method/s will impact on the way in which they receive and process information.

- **British Sign Language (BSL)** is a recognised language which uses hand movements and facial expressions. It uses a different grammar and word order to English and does not have a written form.
- **Irish Sign Language (ISL)** is a recognised language which uses hand movements and facial expressions. Like BSL, it uses a different grammar and word order to spoken Irish and does not have a written form. ISL is a different language to BSL, although some ISL users may also use BSL.
- **Lip-reading** is a technique of understanding speech by visually interpreting the movements of the lips, face and tongue. Although many deaf children use lip-reading to support spoken communication, not all speech can be lip-read.
- **Cued speech** uses hand shapes to represent the sounds of English visually, to support lip-reading of spoken English.
- **Sign Supported English (SSE)** uses signs from BSL in English word order, usually to support spoken English.
- **Sign Supported Welsh (SSW)** uses signs from BSL in Welsh word order, usually to support spoken Welsh.
- **Total Communication** is a combination of various multi-sensory modes of communication, such as speech, sign, gesture, symbols, written words and touch. The combination used depends on the needs and abilities of the individual.

Some children may have used their residual hearing to develop good listening and speaking skills, especially if they were not born deaf. The standard of a child's speech should not be taken as a reflection of their level of hearing.



**Many children will use a combination of all of these methods to communicate. Whichever method a deaf child uses, it's important to be aware that the written word may present difficulties.**

**Deaf children often rely on family, friends or professionals to give them information. It's important that as they get older they are able to access information themselves, rather than someone else doing it for them.**

## **How to make your content more accessible**

The following tips will help to make your content accessible for deaf young people, and will make it more appealing to other young people.

### **Put yourself in their shoes**

- What age range are you communicating with? Think about how you'd speak to a child, teenager or young person of this age, and try to reflect this in your content.
- What might be going on in their lives at school, at home or in friendship groups?
- Would including a deaf character in the resource appeal to your audience?

### **Know what you want to say and communicate it clearly**

- Have one message and break it down into simple steps, such as 'Fill in the form. Email it to us'.
- Use simple images to illustrate each step, such as an email icon beside the words 'email it to us'.
- If the task can't be made more accessible, for example if it involves filling in a form which can't be simplified, add a clear instruction like 'ask an adult to help you out'.

### **Keep it simple**

- Use easier words, like 'place' instead of 'venue,' 'help' instead of 'facilitate,' and 'start' instead of 'commence.'
- Keep it short and snappy. For example, 'The course is available to young people and consists of six sessions designed to promote positive mental health and good emotional wellbeing,' can be turned into 'Angry? Sad? Excited? Come and talk about your feelings.'

- Try to avoid confusing language, such as idioms like ‘it’s raining cats and dogs’. Figures of speech can be hard for deaf young people to understand.
- If you need to use specialist vocabulary or complicated words, offer definitions of these words within the content.

### Think visually

- Think about the layout of your page. Large blocks of text are unappealing and your reader will switch off.
- Use images, animation and colour to illustrate what you want to say.
- Pull out key information using box-outs, sub-headings, bullet points and bold font.
- Video and animation can bring a subject to life, especially for deaf children and young people who may be more used to communicating visually. See the next section for information on making video content accessible.

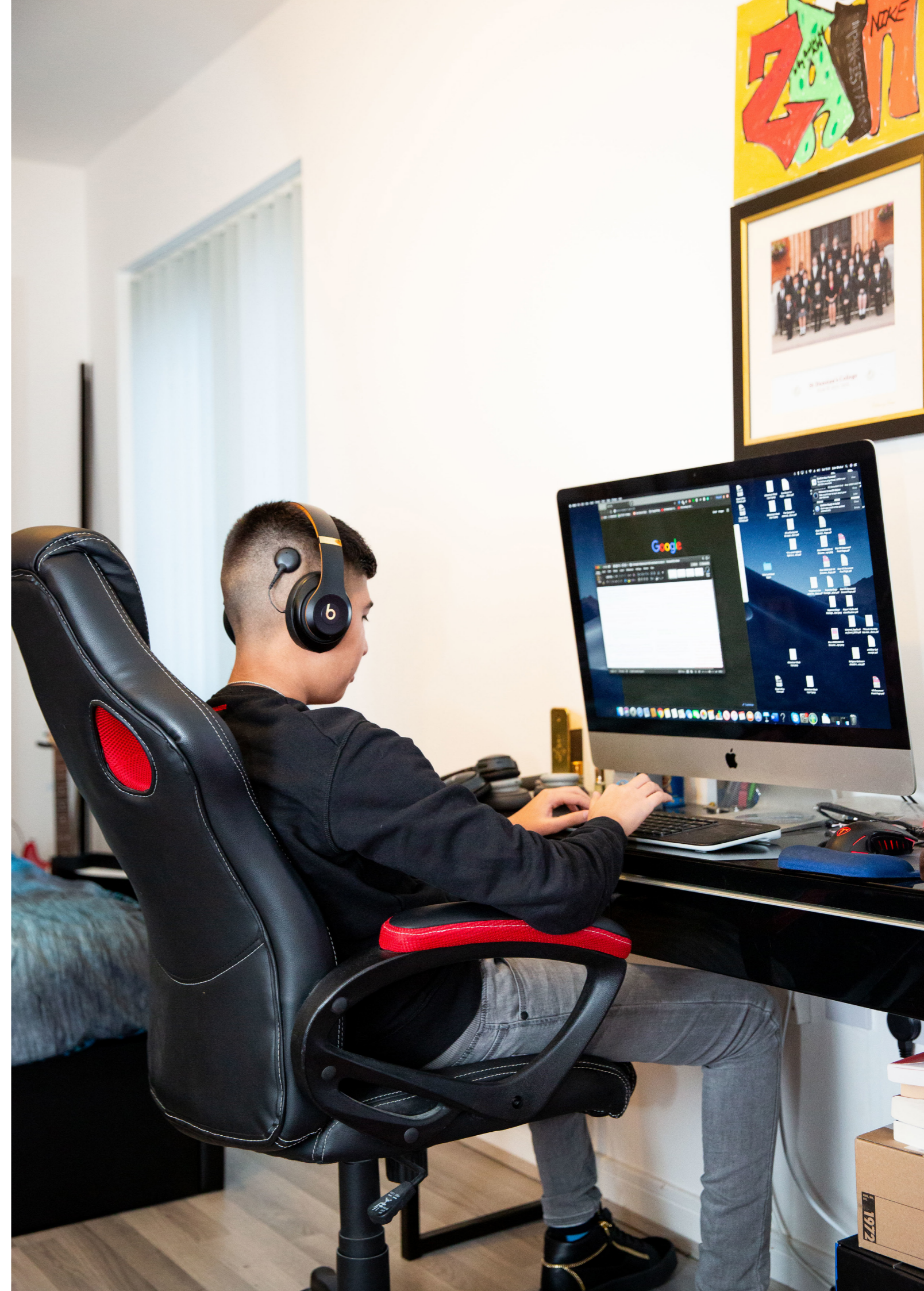
#### Want feedback?

Ask your audience for feedback on your information by adding a feedback form or button to your website.

### Producing new video content for children and young people

If you’re creating a video for children and young people, think about how much information they’ll be able to process. If you’re trying to convey a lot of information, you’ll need to do this in an accessible way.

- Use imagery, cartoons, animation, flick-through books and picture stories. Break information into small, manageable chunks, rather than having someone talking into the camera for a long time. For example, this video about loop systems uses animation to explain complex information:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1MvSvRhyU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1MvSvRhyU).
- Show emotions and use body language to help deaf children understand what’s happening, like in this video about becoming a TV presenter:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5d1ruxR3ao](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5d1ruxR3ao).



- Hold up placards or use other visual clues to let deaf children know when the topic has changed, like in this video about a deaf driving instructor: [youtu.be/OhwK2In5aBs](https://youtu.be/OhwK2In5aBs).
- Make your content engaging and vibrant, like this video teaching Halloween signs: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt8hdo5XrWk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt8hdo5XrWk).
- Include deaf children and children with disabilities in your videos. It's important to show positive role models. This home workout video features Jodie, a deaf professional rugby player. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JWT9Raxlbl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JWT9Raxlbl).

## Making video content accessible for deaf children and young people

### 1 Face the camera when you're talking

If you turn your head to the side while you're talking, the young person watching can't see your mouth, and it makes it much harder for them to lip-read.

Some of our [deaf young people helped create a video about this](#).

### 2 Speak clearly and naturally

Speaking very quickly can mean that the subtitles are hard to follow. However, speaking unusually slowly or too loudly makes lip-reading difficult. Speak as you normally would, pausing between sentences to allow deaf children and young people time to process what you've said.

### 3 Don't cover your mouth

Covering your mouth with your hands makes lip-reading very difficult. It may also muffle any sound you're making.

### 4 Use gestures and facial expressions meaningfully

Using gestures and facial expressions where appropriate can help to support understanding, but be careful not to exaggerate. Excessive gestures and facial expressions can be distracting.

To make sure deaf people can access existing video content, try to add subtitling and/or British Sign Language (BSL) translation where possible.

Remember to also provide a transcript for your video. If BSL translation is not available, consider offering a modified transcript, explaining the key points through simple language and images.

### Subtitles

The terms 'caption' and 'subtitle' have similar meanings. Captions commonly refer to on-screen text specifically designed for deaf viewers, and include descriptions of sounds and music. Subtitles are straight transcriptions or translations of dialogue. For the purposes of this guidance, we've chosen to use the more commonly known term 'subtitle'.

Having subtitles can help any child or young person to understand what's being said on screen, not just deaf users.

Subtitling your video content is relatively straightforward and can mean the difference between a deaf young person being able to access your message or not.

**There are some free apps available on the internet, which you could use to add subtitles to your videos. The accuracy might not be perfect on the first attempt, but they can be easily edited and changed before publishing. If you are subtitling a longer video then you may wish to consider paying a company to add subtitles.**

If you'd like to use a subtitling app, our webpage shows you some of the most reliable options: [www.ndcs.org.uk/livetranscribe](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/livetranscribe).

Remember to check that all subtitles are accurate before publishing the video.



### **BSL translation**

British Sign Language (BSL) is a recognised language with its own rules and grammar. BSL is the language of the UK Deaf community and it's estimated that about 50,000–70,000 people use it as their first or preferred language. For children who use BSL as their language of choice, offering BSL translation is a must. Adding BSL translation to your video content is quick and relatively inexpensive to do.

As BSL is a visual language, there are significant regional variations across the UK. For example, a BSL user in Scotland might use different signs to a BSL user in England, even though they both speak the same language. For this reason, you may wish to use an interpreter who is local to the area where your content is being shown.

In Northern Ireland, Irish Sign Language (ISL) is also used in some areas. ISL and BSL are recognised equally under the 2016 Sign Language Framework.

### **Finding the right service**

Video production companies will be able to consult with you on what visual techniques will engage your target audience. If you want to add subtitles or BSL translation to your video content, try searching online to find the right service for you.

Here are just a few organisations offering subtitling, translation or deaf-friendly content production services:

- Deaf Friendly Business Solutions: [www.deaf-friendly.co.uk](http://www.deaf-friendly.co.uk)
- ITV SignPost: [www.signpostbsl.com](http://www.signpostbsl.com)
- Red Bee Media: [www.redbeemedia.com](http://www.redbeemedia.com)
- Remark! [www.remark.uk.com](http://www.remark.uk.com)
- Sign Solutions: [www.signsolutions.uk.com](http://www.signsolutions.uk.com)
- Sign Language Interactions: [www.signlanguageinteractions.com](http://www.signlanguageinteractions.com).

When you're arranging BSL translation, ask content producers to consider the age range, ethnicity and regional dialect of translators to ensure the video content is engaging and representative of deaf young people.

## Why is accessibility important?

The Equality Act came into force in most of the UK on 1 October 2010, replacing the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. The Act makes clear that it is unlawful to discriminate against a disabled person because of their disability, unless this behaviour can be justified.

### The Act states that it is against the law to:

- refuse to serve a disabled person
- offer a disabled person a service that is not as good as a service being offered to a non-disabled person
- provide a service to a disabled person on different terms to those given to a non-disabled person
- provide goods or services in a way that makes it unreasonably difficult or impossible for a disabled person to use the goods or service.

In Northern Ireland the Equality Act is not in force but similar duties are in place through Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

It's an organisation's responsibility to take reasonable steps to provide information in an accessible format, such as with subtitles and BSL translation. By making your content accessible in this way, you could potentially widen your audience to include over 50,000 deaf children and young people across the UK.

## Deaf-friendly Standard

The Deaf-friendly Standard is an award for organisations and leisure providers which demonstrate inclusivity and good communication in their services for deaf children and young people. The standard has three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. These are based on criteria points that cover areas such as deaf awareness, contact methods and health and safety.

Our framework can help services understand how to behave and demonstrate that they are deaf-friendly and inclusive. This makes it easier for deaf children, young people and their families and friends to identify deaf-friendly services in their area.

All organisations offering services for children and young people can apply for the Deaf-friendly Standard, providing they meet certain criteria. To find out more about the Deaf-friendly Standard, including information on how to apply, visit [www.ndcs.org.uk/deaffriendlystandard](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/deaffriendlystandard).



### Any questions?

We're here to help if you have any questions on accessibility for deaf children and young people. If you have a query or you'd like to give us feedback, please contact us at [cyp@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:cyp@ndcs.org.uk) or check out our website for more information: [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk).





**We are the National Deaf Children's Society,  
the leading charity for deaf children.**

**National Deaf Children's Society  
Ground Floor South, Castle House  
37-45 Paul Street, London EC2A 4LS**

The National Deaf Children's Society is a registered charity  
in England and Wales no. 1016532 and in Scotland no. SC040779 B0050

