



Creating good listening conditions

What do we mean by listening conditions?

We mean an environment (like your home) where the listening conditions (or acoustics) are at their optimum level so that your child has the best chance to access sound and develop their listening and language skills. For example, good listening conditions would mean there is no background noise or it's reduced.

Why are listening conditions important for deaf children?

Unlike hearing children, deaf children find it difficult to filter sounds so any background noise is going to get mixed in with what your child is trying to listen to and make understanding speech harder for them. For example, if they wear hearing aids or implants, it makes all sounds in that room louder (the

tv, people talking, plates clattering) as well as the sound they're trying to listen to (mum reading them a story). Think about how hard it can be to have a conversation in a busy restaurant, for example. So having a quiet environment in the home where you can talk and play helps to develop their understanding of sounds and language.

As your child gets older and starts nursery or school, a quiet environment will become much more difficult to achieve and this sudden change can be very challenging. This listening conditions of a school will be very important for your child. School and nursery classrooms can also be very noisy.

Why are listening conditions important to learning?

At school, children can spend much of the day just listening, so good conditions are essential for all children to access teaching and learning and be fully included in school life.

Research has shown that there is a link between attainment and good acoustics for both deaf and hearing pupils – and poor classroom acoustics can be particularly challenging for children with glue ear or a permanent hearing loss.

Poor acoustics can also make it difficult for deaf children to make the best use of their hearing aids and cochlear implants, as they make all noises in the classroom louder, not just the

teacher's voice. These noises can drown out the teacher and may mean that the child misses much of the lesson.

For a child to understand what is being spoken, the teacher's voice needs to be louder than the background noise. If the classroom is too noisy most teachers will have difficulty speaking loud enough to enable good understanding. As adults, because of our knowledge of language, we are able to fill in the gaps where we haven't heard the full message. Children have a more limited language and are therefore less able to fill in the gaps.

In addition, many classrooms produce an echo effect which prolongs sounds, making listening more difficult. Echo occurs when the sound from the source has stopped, but reverberations from the sound continue in the room. If the surfaces in the room are hard then the sound may bounce around the room, arriving at the child's ear at different times and making it difficult to listen to the message. If we can make the surfaces more absorbent of sound this can help reduce the echo.

Find out what a noisy classroom sounds like to deaf children.

What should I look at before my child starts nursery or school?

- Make sure you visit the school or nursery during an ordinary working day so you can hear for yourself how noisy it is when all the children are in.
- Talk to staff about any quiet areas that are used for small group or individual work.
- Talk to staff about how much of the day is formally teacher-led, such as story time, when the general background noise would be less.
- Find out if there's any technology that could help your child, such as radio aids or soundfield systems.

- Make sure that the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) (additional learning needs coordinator in Scotland) and teacher have been told of your child's hearing loss and that the school and local authority are aware of any possible modifications that would have to be made.
- Ask about support available from the Teacher of the Deaf to ensure rooms are good listening environments and that your child has the necessary support.

What can be done to improve the listening conditions at my child's school?

Under the Equality Act 2010 (or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland), schools and nurseries have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled pupils are not disadvantaged because of their disability. Schools also have to plan better access for disabled pupils. This includes improving the physical environment of the school such as improving acoustics.

For more information on your child's rights go to The Equality Act and your child's education.

Examples of reasonable adjustments, and simple cost-effective improvements, that could be made to classrooms include:

- Making sure doors are shut when teaching
- Turning off electrical equipment that is not being used
- Using fabric in classroom wall and table displays to absorb sound
- Fixing plastic buffers on chair or table legs to reduce the noise of scraping chairs
- Suspending displays from the ceiling to reduce reverberation
- Having as many carpeted areas as possible
- Fitting double glazing
- Fitting specialist acoustic boarding to ceiling or walls.

Are you worried about the listening conditions at your child's school?

- Does your child come home from school or nursery often complaining that the class is too noisy, and that they cannot hear their teacher or friends?
- Ask your child how well they can hear what their teacher and friends are saying.
- Ask whether they have more problems in one classroom or area than another.
- Does your child report that other children in her class cannot hear what the teacher is saying?
- Have you sought views from your child on the listening conditions at their school? Have a look at some example pupil interview surveys

If further improvements are needed or you have any concerns, you could consider:

Talking to your local Teacher of the Deaf about advice and support they can offer

Asking the school or local authority for an acoustic review of the classroom from a professional acoustician (Your school can locate an acoustician by going to the Institute of Acoustics website (www.ioa.org.uk), or a company which is a member of the Association of Noise Consultants (www.association-of-noise-consultants.co.uk)).

Assistive technologies such as radio aids and soundfield systems can help – but should be additional to, not instead of good acoustics.

Education and learning

Choosing a deaf-friendly school

My child didn't get into our choice of school in England – what now?

My child didn't get into our choice of school in Wales – what now?

My child didn't get into our choice of school in Northern Ireland – what now?

My child didn't get into our choice of school in Scotland – what now?

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Preparing your deaf child for primary school

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Getting additional support: Northern Ireland

Getting additional support: Scotland

Getting additional support: Wales

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How do children learn?

Learning how to learn

Learning new information and skills

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