



Moving towards using positive language around Deafness / Hard of Hearing

It is intended that this document is for BATOD members to support them in approaching LAs or settings where the terminology hearing impaired (HI) is used. You may wish to add to this or amend according to the needs or context of the area/setting you are approaching. This document has been written by BATOD and d/Deaf Teachers of the Deaf.

I am writing to you about the use of the term 'hearing impairment' or 'hearing impaired' (HI) which is widely used in deaf education and in services for deaf children. I would like to request that we move away from this terminology as it is outdated, offensive and stems from a medical perspective of deafness. We wish that the following terminology is used: deaf or hard of hearing.

This move has been driven forward by Dani Sive and Martine Monksfield, with the support of d/Deaf teachers and BATOD. We recognise that the change in terminology has to be approached in areas individually, which is why I am approaching you.

Reasons for removing HI label:

1. The term 'hearing impairment' is very medical and implies a deficit or an impediment, and something that needs to be fixed. We acknowledge that many hearing people consider deafness to be an impairment or a disability, but as deaf (and many hearing) professionals or deaf people in the Deaf community, we do not consider this as such. The notion of fixing the impairment or disability to 'normalise' deaf children can have a detrimental impact on deaf children's identity and sense of belonging. 'Hard of hearing', 'partially hearing' or 'partially deaf', or even just 'deaf' are much more positive term/s that don't reflect a medical deficit and are less oppressive and audist.
2. We are referring to deaf children (regardless of their level of deafness), and not hearing children, nor should we be trying to make deaf children hearing, so the word 'hearing' can be misleading or misinterpreted.

3. The sign and the connotation behind the term 'impairment' is 'damaged' or 'broken' and this can have a very negative impact on the perspective of the parents of deaf children, or even on professionals' perspective.
4. Some deaf children may identify as 'hearing impaired' because they are labelled as such by their parents and professionals that work with them, often without realising what it actually means. It may be an idea to work with these deaf children and their families on developing a deaf identity and we would suggest seeking out Deaf-led adults for these sessions which can be hugely beneficial for these children and their families.
5. The mandatory qualification for teaching deaf children is 'Teacher of the Deaf (ToD)' qualification and not ToHI. This makes it confusing to have outdated terminology mixed with a positive terminology. It is important we remove the outdated terminology to match current thinking and perspectives.
6. Many QToDs and Deaf QToDs find that the term 'hearing impaired' dismisses the importance and value of the Deaf community and the right of the child to have or develop a deaf identity as part of a linguistic and cultural minority.
7. Some deaf children prefer to identify with the hearing community and have a hearing identity, but the 'hearing impaired' label still has a negative connotation, so we shouldn't call deaf children with a hearing identity "hearing impaired".
8. Deaf children and adults who refer to themselves as hearing impaired can be seen as a form of internalised oppression or audism - "I can't because I'm impaired". We don't think deaf and hard of hearing children should identify with such a negative/medical term, and should identify with a term that's more positive with a 'can do' attitude in spite of their deafness, or disability. We believe that professionals who work with them should not see them as impaired either.
9. We are aware that those with eyesight issues – vision impaired (VI) - do not view the terminology in the same way as we view HI. There are many reasons for this; deafness has a community where a main shared language (BSL) is used, and with this comes culture, linguistics, norms and a shared history etc. We respect those who wish to use VI as their terminology and wish to make it clear these are two separate groups with different needs.
10. Deciding upon whether to use deaf or Deaf (d/D) will depend on the context; [BATOD uses deaf](#) to include all deaf children regardless of their hearing levels and whether they identify with the deaf or hearing world (or both). We suggest if you are referring to deafness from a Deaf community perspective as well as those from a hearing community perspective (or both) to use d/D, otherwise deaf will include all (and ensure to include a note in the text to reflect this).

Terminology to use

We suggest that going forward, in place of HI terminology the following is used instead; **deaf and/or hard of hearing**.

For example:

For resource bases for deaf children; Flexstone Primary deaf resource base / Flexstone Secondary deaf and hard of hearing resource base.

Referring to deaf children and young people; Mohammed is deaf and has a moderate hearing level or moderate deafness without his hearing aids.

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