**Radio aids – campaigns toolkit**

Everyday life is full of situations when children can’t hear their parents clearly, and radio aids can help get around this.

Despite this, many local authorities do not make radio aids available to parents of deaf children to use at home. This is a particular issue for parents of pre-school deaf children, even though language and communication is especially important in these early years.

We believe that local authorities should cover the cost of radio aids for deaf children and ensure that families can use these at home, including in the early years. Whilst some parents chose to buy a radio aid themselves, we do not believe that they should have to.

This campaigns toolkit includes some template letters that you can use to challenge your local authority if they are refusing to provide you with a radio aid to use at home and/or you have had to buy one yourself.

**Taking action**

First, you should ask for information from your child’s Teacher of the Deaf on why your child cannot have a radio aid to use at home. You should ideally ask for a radio aid in writing. You should also ask for your child’s Teacher of the Deaf to give their reasons in writing why a radio aid cannot be provided.

In some cases, there may be good reasons why a radio aid is not the right option at this time. It’s also possible that a Teacher of the Deaf may have concerns about loss or damage to equipment. Having an open discussion may help to find possible solutions to any issues.

If the answer is still no, there are two main ways in which you can take action:

1. Making a disability discrimination complaint

If you live in England, Scotland and Wales, local authorities are required, under the Equality Act 2010, to provide ‘auxiliary aids’ (which includes radio aids) as a reasonable adjustment to disabled people. Given the importance of good language and communication, particularly in the early years, we think it should be seen as unreasonable to deny a family with a deaf child a radio aid unless there are good reasons why not.

Overleaf, you can find two versions of template letters that you can use.

* Version 1 is for families that do not currently have a radio aid.
* Version 2 is for families that have a radio aid which they have bought themselves because the local authority would not provide.

If the local authority still says no, the next step will be to then consider legal action. We’re looking for families who, with lots of support from us, might be interested in taking legal action on radio aids in the early years.

The Equality Act does not apply in Northern Ireland. Whilst there are disability discrimination laws in place, local authorities do not have to provide radio aids as a reasonable adjustment. Please contact [our helpline](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/) for more information about your options here.

1. Using laws around special or additional needs

If your child already has an Education, Health and Care plan (England), a statement of special educational needs (Wales and Northern Ireland) or a co-ordinated support plan (Scotland), you can also ask for a review of the plan/statement so that a radio aid can be added to it. You also have the right to request an assessment for a plan or statement if your child does not already have one. [Our website](http://www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/education_for_deaf_children/education_during_school_years/deaf_children_with.html) has more information about your rights under laws for children with special or additional needs.

If, after a complaint, the local authority still says no, you then have the option to escalate your complaint to a special Tribunal that hears cases around laws relating to special or additional needs. There are time limits, so it is important to get more advice or information as soon as this happens.

We would encourage you to make a complaint as soon as you are told or learn that your child cannot have a radio aid. This is because there are sometimes time limits on when you can take follow-up action if you need to.

For more information and advice on any of the above, you can contact [our helpline](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/). We’ve also explained some of the common issues around the provision of radio aids below.

If you do decide to make a formal complaint, please do let us know via [our helpline](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/our-services/services-for-families/helpline/). Our casework and campaigns teams may be able to support. We may also be put you in touch with other parents in the area, including parent representatives at Children’s Hearing Services Working Group meetings.

**Common issues and frequently asked questions**

**The local authority says my child is too young to have a radio aid. When is the right age to fit radio aids?**

This will vary according to individual children and the views and wishes of the parents. We believe that parents should be given balanced information about radio aids so that they can make informed choices over when the right time is to try a radio aid with their child.

[Quality standards on the use of personal radio aids](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/quality-standards-for-the-use-of-personal-radio-aids-promoting-easier-listening-for-deaf-children/) state that every deaf child should be considered for a radio aid at first hearing aid fitting.

Some professionals feel that children should become established hearing aid or cochlear implant users (or for a stable cochlear implant map to be in place) before a radio aid is introduced. However, this can usually happen reasonably quickly. We do not believe there should be any more of a delay in fitting a cochlear implanted child with a radio aid than with a child with a hearing aid.

Some professionals feel that a radio aid should not be fitted until a child can give feedback on the quality of sound. We do not agree – we believe it is possible to see how a child is benefiting from a radio aid through observation and professional judgement.

**Is it OK for services to require parents to insure radio aids for use at home?**

No. We do not believe that it would be reasonable or fair to deny a child a radio aid that would benefit them simply on the basis of their parents’ insurance arrangements.

We are aware that some parents have been asked to insure radio aids against loss or damage as a condition of the FM system being made available outside school hours. It may be possible to add radio aids to home contents insurance at no additional cost to parents. However, this should not be a requirement. Parents must not be forced to insure their child’s radio aid, and pressure must not be put on families to insure it. Equipment purchased by the local authority remains the local authority's property. Ultimately, it is therefore the local authority's responsibility to make provision for repair or replacement of broken or lost equipment as required.

More information is set out in our position statement [Insurance and Replacement of Hearing Aid Equipment](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/4192/charging-insurance-hearing-listening-equipment-position-statement-march-2018.pdf).

We encourage services to work with parents to ensure they are aware of the need to take good care of radio aid devices.

**The local authority wants parents to cover the cost of radio aids through the child’s Disability Living Allowance – is this OK?**

No. The law is clear that schools or local authorities cannot ask families to cover the cost of things that would be regarded as reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. Radio aids can be seen as auxiliary aids and public bodies have a reasonable adjustment to provide these to disabled people. Whether the family claims Disability Living Allowance is therefore irrelevant.

Separately, we want to see the provision of radio aids joined up with provision of and maintenance of any other hearing technology that children are using. If families buy their own radio aids, there is a risk it won’t be joined up and the health/education bodies won’t be able to support or maintain.

We recognise that families do sometimes purchase equipment themselves. However, local authorities must not suggest or expect families to do so.

**Are there any safety issues?**

Where an integrated hearing/radio aid is being used, it should be possible to secure the battery so that it is tamperproof and that young children can’t access it.

Otherwise, radio aids usually work by adding a ‘shoe’ to the bottom of the hearing aid. When this is done, this means that the battery on the hearing aid is no longer tamperproof.

In any event, no pre-school deaf child should ever be left unsupervised whilst wearing their hearing aids, whether at home or in nursery settings. Regardless of battery locks, the other parts of the hearing aid are a choking hazard for small children – including, in particular, the radio aid shoe, which the child would have to remove to get to the battery.

You should be given information and support on how to use radio aids effectively and how to watch out for this concern.

**Where can I find more information about radio aids?**

We have lots of information on [our website](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/products-and-technology/technology-to-borrow-technology-test-drive/listening/radio-aids/) about radio aids and how they can be used in different situations. You can also download [our booklet](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/how-radio-aids-can-help/) or take a look at [a short video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGhcSirQnmA) featuring a real-life case study.

We also have [information for professionals](https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/being-deaf-friendly/information-for-professionals/early-years-education/radio-aids-in-the-early-years/) on the use of radio aids with pre-school deaf children.

**Template letter 1 – my child does not have a radio aid (for families in England, Scotland or Wales)**

*[The website for your local authority should explain who you can contact to make a formal complaint – try a search for ‘complaints’ and the name of your local authority to find this page. The below is a template for you to edit and add in details about your child. Text in brackets should be removed.]*

Dear Sir/Madam

I am the parent of a deaf child.

I am writing to make a formal complaint about a failure by the local authority to provide auxiliary aids as a reasonable adjustment for my disabled child. I believe that the local authority is failing to comply with its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

I believe that my child would benefit from the provision of a radio aid, and that a failure to provide one places my disabled child at a substantial disadvantage.

A radio aid is a piece of hearing technology that provides my child with additional amplification. It makes it easier for my child to hear my voice clearly, above any other background noise. I am concerned that my child’s language and communication development will suffer if I am not provided with a radio aid to use at home.

*[If you have already tried a radio aid, you may want to add some text here to talk about the difference it made]*

I would like to ask you to reconsider the decisions not to make a radio aid available for me to use at home with my child. If you feel the provision of a radio aid would not be a reasonable adjustment, I would be grateful if you could clearly set out the reasons why.

I would also like to ask you to formally review the local authority’s approach around allowing parents to use radio aids at home. The National Deaf Children’s Society believes that any such policy should meet the relevant quality standards[[1]](#footnote-1) and, in particular, that every deaf child should be considered for a radio aid at first hearing aid fitting. They also believe that any policy should ensure:

* parents have access to the information they need to make informed choices about when to try a radio aid with their child
* that they have the opportunities to try a radio aid at different ages
* that they receive training and support
* that insurance is **not** a condition of being allowed to use radio aids in the home and that there are no other unreasonable barriers in place.

Please ensure that the National Deaf Children’s Society is also informed of the outcome of this review. They can be contacted by emailing campaigns@ndcs.org.uk.

I would be grateful if you would investigate this complaint and provide a response within 28 days.

Yours faithfully

**Template letter 2 – my child has a radio aid which I had to buy myself (for families in England, Scotland or Wales)**

*[The website for your local authority should explain who you can contact to make a formal complaint – try a search for ‘complaints’ and the name of your local authority to find this page. The below is a template for you to edit and add in details about your child. Text in brackets should be removed.]*

Dear Sir/Madam

I am the parent of a deaf child.

I am writing to make a formal complaint about a failure by the local authority to provide auxiliary aids as a reasonable adjustment for my disabled child. I believe that the local authority is failing to comply with its duties under the Equality Act 2010. As a result, disabled children are being placed at substantial disadvantage.

A radio aid is a piece of hearing technology that provides my child with additional amplification. It makes it easier for my child to hear my voice clearly, above any other background noise.

*[you may want to add some text here to talk about the difference radio aids have made]*

I first made a request for a radio aid from the local authority on… *[provide details here on when you first asked the local authority if a radio aid could be provided and what the local authority said. If possible, provide copies of any emails or letters with the local authority on this].*

I believe that my child benefits from the provision of a radio aid. Out of concern for any my child’s development in language and communication, and not wanting to risk any delays, I have already purchased a radio aid. However, I believe that this should have been provided by the local authority.

I would like to ask you to explain why a radio aid was not made available for me to use at home with my child. If you feel the provision of a radio aid would not be a reasonable adjustment, I would be grateful if you could clearly set out the reasons why.

*[you may want to ask the local authority to pay you back for the radio aid – if so add in the following paragraph]* I would also like the local authority to refund me for the cost of the radio aid that I have already purchased.

I would also like to ask you to formally review the local authority’s approach around allowing parents to use radio aids at home. The National Deaf Children’s Society believes that any such policy should meet the relevant quality standards[[2]](#footnote-2) and, in particular, that every deaf child should be considered for a radio aid at first hearing aid fitting. They also believe that any policy should ensure:

* parents have access to the information they need to make informed choices about when to try a radio aid with their child
* that they have the opportunities to try a radio aid at different ages
* that they receive training and support
* that insurance is **not** a condition of being allowed to use radio aids in the home and that there are no other unreasonable barriers in place.

Please ensure that the National Deaf Children’s Society is also informed of the outcome of this review. They can be contacted by emailing campaigns@ndcs.org.uk.

I would be grateful if you would investigate this complaint and provide a response within 28 days.

Yours faithfully,

1. <http://www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=9697> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=9697> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)