

Referring deaf children and young people into Early Help or social care

This reference tool outlines the key points to consider when reviewing the needs of deaf children and their families. Early support practitioners can use this document in their assessments and when making decisions at single points of entry into children's social care within a strengths-based approach.

Note: we use the term 'deaf' to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss such as glue ear.

Key barriers experienced by deaf children

- Over 90% of deaf children are born to parents who have no previous experience of deafness. Many families seek advice on how to support their child and access to impartial advice is critical.
- There is a critical period for language development, and to develop fluency in language (whether spoken or signed), all children must have access and exposure to good language and communication in the early years. Without this, children are at greater risk of poorer health and well-being which can continue into adulthood.
- Deaf children have fewer opportunities to communicate freely and fluently compared to their hearing peers and they may miss or misunderstand important information and social clues. This can result in deaf children and young people experiencing delays in their social and emotional skills, which may lead to isolation and/or bullying.
- Technology such as hearing aids and cochlear implants do not 'cure' deafness; there will still be environments where deaf children will miss information. Such technologies do not mitigate against the emotional impact of deafness. Additional consideration and possible adjustments will always be required by both families and services working with deaf children.
- Research has shown that deaf children are at greater risk of experiencing abuse, mental health problems and poorer educational outcomes. This is not due to deafness itself but is largely the result of social barriers such as not having the right support and accessible services in place.
- Around 23% of deaf children have additional special educational needs.

But, with the right support however deaf children and young people can achieve just as well as their hearing peers. We should have high expectations and aspirations for them and ensure we are doing all we can to support them.

Legal duties

Deaf children aged 0–18 who have a “permanent and substantial impairment” are defined as disabled under the Equality Act 2010 and are automatically defined as “children in need” (section 17(11) Children Act 1989). Local authorities must provide some level of social care assessment to determine eligible needs. This may be by an Early Help Assessment.

Deafblind children should have their needs assessed by a qualified practitioner following Care and Support for Deafblind Children and Adult Policy Guidance (2014).

Parent Carers Needs Assessments

The local authority must assess the support needs of a parent carer of a disabled children if they request it or if they appear to need support (section 17ZD of the Children Act 1989). This also applies where the local authority feels that the child and their family “are persons for whom they may provide or arrange for the provision of services under section 17”.

Transitions assessments

Deaf young people who are **not** receiving support from children’s social care may require support from adult social care. The Care Act 2014 (s58) says local authorities must consider such groups of young people and offer them a transitions assessment where it appears they may need support.

Local authorities carrying out an **Education, Health and Care needs assessment** must seek advice from children’s social care (Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2015). Families and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) who aren’t receiving social care support must receive advice from social care about their services and how to contact them.

Equipment assessment

Many deaf children and young people could benefit from assistive devices or technology to support their independence and safety at home (assistance with falls within section 2 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970). Arrangements for assessing deaf children’s needs can vary so it’s important to find out what arrangements are in place. An Early Help Assessment may not be needed. The Children’s Disability or Children’s Occupational Therapy team should be able to advise you.

Early Help/social care assessment

Under the Equality Act 2010, all learning and play settings should try to meet the communication needs of deaf children so they can develop their language, social, emotional and academic skills. Where settings cannot make ‘reasonable adjustments’, additional support will be required. With parental consent an Early Help/social care assessment may be required to access support.

Where Early Help support is failing to achieve the expected outcomes for the child, statutory social care support must be considered to support the child and their family. A referral should be made to children’s social care, with prior parental consent.

Safeguarding

Persistent neglect of a deaf child’s language and communication needs can result in significant harm to their development and wellbeing. Where there are clear concerns, a referral **must** be made to children’s social care and parents should be informed.

Minimum information to gather at point of referral (add to local assessment template)

- What is the child or young person's diagnosed level of deafness? At what age were they diagnosed?
- Have their parents been offered counselling following their child's diagnosis?
- Are any specialist professionals involved? E.g. Teacher of the Deaf, audiologist, speech and language therapist?
- Is the child attending all their medical appointments?
- What is their preferred method of communication? Is this used in the home by their parents?
- Are parents able to communicate effectively with their child? Do they need additional help to support? What are their expectations for their child? Do they need additional help to support? What are the views of the wider family?
- What is the child's language level? Has this progressed? Is it within expectations for their age and do they have any additional needs?
- For deaf children and young people who use sign language, do their parents know how to access interpreters? If social care request a sign language interpreter they must be registered with the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) or equivalent. www.nrcep.org.uk
- Are there any communication barriers preventing the child taking part in family or community activities?
- Does the deaf child or young person have age appropriate social, emotional and self-care skills?
- Does the child have an Education, Health and Care plan or additional school support?
- Has the family received information about short breaks, support groups, deaf-friendly activities and the National Deaf Children's Society? Have they received information about the Local Offer?
- What are the wishes and feelings of the child or young person? What are their interests? Do they have friends in and outside school?
- Has welfare benefit advice been offered or signposted to?

About us

We are the National Deaf Children's Society, the leading charity for deaf children. We give expert support on childhood deafness, raise awareness and campaign for deaf children's rights, so they have the same opportunities as everyone else.

There are around 50,000 deaf children in the UK. We're here for every deaf child who needs us – no matter what their level or type of deafness or how they communicate. We support deaf children and their families, and work with decision-makers and professionals to overcome the barriers that hold deaf children back. Freephone Helpline: 0808 800 8880 Helpline@ndcs.org.uk www.ndcs.org.uk

Get free social care advice

For free specialist social care advice, training or online resources go to www.ndcs.org.uk/socialcareadvice.

Thanks to the North East Social Workers with Deaf Children group for developing this tool.