

British Sign Language (BSL) in Scotland: Language and communication guide for professionals working with deaf children and young people



**Our vision is a
world without
barriers for
every deaf child.**

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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.

We use the term 'parent' to refer to all parents and carers of children.

1

This guide

This guide supports professionals working with deaf children and their families in Scotland to find out more about early years language and communication. The guide also lists several other resources that could be helpful.

Many professionals have a lot of experience and expertise in supporting the development of language and communication among deaf children. Other professionals may work less frequently with deaf children but still have a key role to play in supporting this work. This guide can be used a reference point for Scottish audiologists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, Teachers of the Deaf, health visitors, mainstream teachers and social workers.

The guide details the services and resources provided by the National Deaf Children's Society, which professionals can access online, and video case studies which can be used at appointments and shared with families you work with. There is also reference to the type of support that is available from different public bodies in Scotland. Some key principles developed through feedback from deaf children and their families are also set out to ensure consistency in the messages and communication they receive.

Key principles on language and communication

We have developed a set of key principles to help parents of deaf children make decisions about help for their child. We have a range of resources available for families to support the following principles:

The principles are:

- › Every deaf child has the right to develop effective language and communication. They need open access to a rich language environment and good support from adults who are fluent in the chosen language(s), whether signed or spoken.
- › Different approaches to language and communication suit different children, and the family's circumstances should be taken into consideration when choosing the approach.
- › Parents should be able to make informed choices about which approaches to use when developing their child's language and communication. To do this, parents need high-quality information and opportunities to deepen their understanding and experience of different approaches.
- › Families should receive support from knowledgeable and experienced, qualified providers to help them create the best possible learning environment for their child.

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Supporting a Scottish family with language and communication

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach

In Scotland, professionals deliver support as part of a framework called Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). This requires professionals to take a child-centred approach, focused on addressing the needs of every child early on. Each child with additional support needs should have a personalised child's plan that set outs the support they will receive. With deaf children this should address the development of good, age-appropriate language and communication to meet the overall objective of GIRFEC. This means that all children are loved, safe and respected and can realise their full potential at home, in school or the wider community.

The British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Act 2015

The BSL Act requires the Scottish Government, local authorities, local health boards and other listed bodies to create their own BSL plans on how they will promote the use of BSL and improve access to services for deaf people living in Scotland. For example, each local authority must produce a BSL plan.

These plans set out the support available to deaf children and their families in local areas, based on the BSL plans produced in response to the BSL Act. There are major differences in the support provided to families by local authorities. In some cases it can include funding for BSL courses, information packs, educational resources, regular family visits from a Teacher of the Deaf or baby signing classes. Details for each council's local plan are available [here](#).

The Hearing Impairment Network for Children and Young People (HINCYP) (Scotland)

Scotland is the first nation in the UK to have a National Managed Clinical Network for supporting deaf children. This is a multi-disciplinary body that supports the development of best practice in working with deaf children across Scotland. Resources can be downloaded from the Network's website [here](#).

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004

All staff working with children with additional support needs (ASN) in schools, nurseries or childcare settings should be aware of local authority duties and parents', carers' and children's rights under the Education (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004.

Under the ASL Act, local authorities have specific duties to make sure that children and young people who have ASN are given the support they need to reach their full potential.

Local authority duties include working with parents to identify children with ASN and to implement a support plan that provides the child with 'adequate and efficient' support in preschool or school. Key duties are also around ensuring the quality of support meets the needs of the child, and any challenges in support provision must be mitigated and reported on.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act sets out a wide range of important legal rights for disabled children and their families. It only applies to those who have a permanent disability. If a child has a temporary hearing loss, such as glue ear, the Act will only apply if the condition has lasted (or is likely to last) for 12 months or more.

Under the Equality Act, a child has the right to:

- › not be discriminated against because of their deafness
- › expect that public services (such as schools, nurseries and the NHS) will make 'reasonable adjustments' to how they do things to make sure deaf children can get involved
- › expect that public services will think about how they can promote equality of opportunity for deaf children, and to think about the impact that their policies, procedures and decisions have on deaf children and their families.

3

Resources developed by the National Deaf Children's Society

Resources published by the National Deaf Children's Society are designed to help deaf children and their families as their circumstances and needs develop over the years. The resources will help them make informed choices and access services available to them.

You might find it useful to refer families to our Scotland-specific video case studies, which give examples of parents sharing their stories, and information from the different professionals that families might meet.

Watch Ruth explaining the role of the audiologist
– bit.ly/pro-audiologist

Watch Ann explaining the role of the paediatrician
– bit.ly/pro-paediatrician

Watch Fiona explaining the role of the speech and language therapist – bit.ly/pro-SLT

Watch Barbara explaining the role of the Teacher of the Deaf
– bit.ly/pro-ToD

Stories from six families
– bit.ly/different-directions

From our website

You can find top tips and links to language and communication resources on our website [here](#). You can find out more about early years support in Scotland [here](#).

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Key messages to share with parents of deaf children in the early years

Communication begins at birth, long before first words – with cries and then coos and smiles. Developing language and communication skills in early years is important. Here are some tips for professionals to share with parents of a deaf child:

- › Children learn to communicate when they feel safe, secure and confident that their communication will be understood and valued.
- › Remember that communication and language are not the same thing. Whatever language you use with your child, good communication will always be important.
- › An environment where there is lots of communication and interaction between everyone is extremely important. You don't need to limit or simplify your communication because your child is deaf.
- › Keep it visual. Use gestures, facial expressions, body language etc to support good communication.
- › If your child uses hearing technology, for example a hearing aid or cochlear implant, make sure it is working properly and that your child is using it for as many of their waking hours as possible.
- › Some children who wear hearing aids or cochlear implants also use additional aids, for example a streamer or a radio aid. Ask your audiologist if these might be appropriate for your child.
- › Children learn to communicate when they are given opportunities to take part in the conversation. Remember to give your deaf child a little longer to respond.

- › Babies and toddlers learn to communicate when you talk and/or sign about the things that they are focused on or interested in.
- › Praise your child when they respond, or attempt to respond, through either verbal or non-verbal communication. This will help to positively reinforce communication to your child.
- › Play with your child as much as possible. Children who enjoy play, and particularly imaginative play ('pretending'), tend to be better language learners.
- › Early experience of sharing and enjoying books helps children to learn language, and lays the foundations for reading.
- › Some parents feel that because their child is deaf, they must become 'teachers' to make sure that their child develops language and communication skills. Remember that you should communicate as you would with any other child – including through play and everyday activities.

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What support is provided to learn British Sign Language (BSL)?

Like any spoken language, it takes time and practice to learn and use BSL fluently. BSL is broken down into different levels and can be learnt through a variety of courses, from basic introductory courses to recognised qualifications.

There are many providers of BSL courses:

- › Local authorities
- › Health boards
- › Local colleges
- › Private businesses
- › Charities (including the National Deaf Children's Society's Family Sign Language course)
- › Voluntary groups.

The type and level of support provided by local authorities for parents to learn BSL varies greatly, but can include:

- › home/online tuition for families from a Teacher of the Deaf or a sign language tutor/deaf role model
- › introduction to BSL classes aimed at families, Family Sign Language courses or similar
- › introductory courses for parents of deaf young children
- › setting up free Level 1 or 2 BSL classes for families.

Other services local authorities might provide include:

- › lending BSL resources such as books and DVDs
- › family support workers
- › groups for families and children to practise BSL, liaising with other local organisations for support.

See local BSL plans for further details [here](#).

Case study – Highland Deaf Education Service (HDES) BSL digital teaching pack

HDES has produced a BSL digital teaching pack for mainstream schools which follows a framework similar to that of other taught modern languages. The pack is designed to be delivered by a non-signer who is learning alongside their pupils and is a unique product that provides the teacher with lesson plans, video clips and all resources required for a basic BSL course. Training can also be given and ranges from an hour online to three-day courses in person. The training can be as basic as how to navigate the pack or a full basic BSL course.

Over 120 teachers in Highland have been trained to use it in 41 primary and 19 secondary schools. The pack has been well received across Scotland, with 17 local authorities currently using it. There has been great feedback from those using it, they said:

- › “Best organised teaching resource I have seen in my career.”
- › “Can’t believe how quickly the kids have picked it up.”

You may wish to share this information with any parents or carers who would like their child’s nursery or school teachers to implement the pack. Ask them to contact Sheila Lundberg, Co-ordinator of the Highland Deaf Education Service at Dingwall Academy: Sheila.Lundberg@highland.gov.uk

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Which BSL courses are available in Scotland? Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

FAQ: I want to complete a formal BSL course, how much will this cost?

Introductory or Family Sign Language courses tend to be free. However, these courses will only teach you a very basic level of BSL which will not be advanced enough for those who wish to take a **sign-bilingual** or Total Communication approach. The cost of accredited courses is variable at Level 1, with courses ranging from free to more than £400 depending on the provider. The cost of BSL is often higher for more advanced levels.

You may find it useful to view our information on getting support for learning BSL, which explains in more detail the types of support local authorities may offer.

If you know a family who can't access funds or courses to learn BSL in your local area, please contact the **National Deaf Children's Society Freephone Helpline** which may be able to give information and support. Some local authorities offer funding for places on accredited courses from local providers. However, funding does not always cover assessment fees.

FAQ: Which courses are available in Scotland?

The Scottish Qualifications Authority offers The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) which develops knowledge and skills in BSL and other related areas, from SCQF Level 3 to SCQF Level 8. You can find more information **here**.

Signature offers accredited BSL courses from Level 1 through to Level 6. You can find more details about each stage through the **Signature website**. To find an approved Signature centre near you visit their website **here**.

Deaf Action is a deaf led charity in Scotland, it offers taster BSL courses and up to Level 3 BSL. To find out more about its courses visit its **website**.

Visit our website **www.ndcs.org.uk** or contact our **Freephone Helpline** to refer a family to us or ask for advice.



Appendix 1: Communication and language tool links to external websites

www.rcslt.org/related/locations/scotland/

www.gov.scot/publications/girfec-national-practice-model/

www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/

www.cuedspeech.co.uk/

www.makaton.org/aboutMakaton/

www.avuk.org/what-is-auditory-verbal-therapy

www.signedlanguage.co.uk/SignSupportedEnglish.html

www.british-sign.co.uk/what-is-british-sign-language/

ncbegin.org/oralauditory-oral/

www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/aud_oral_edu.htm

Please note, our signposting is not a recommendation as we cannot make any guarantees or assurances about the quality of provision.

About us

We're here for every deaf child who needs us – no matter what their level or type of deafness or how they communicate.

Visit our website www.ndcs.org.uk or contact our Freephone Helpline to find out how we can support your child at every stage of their life. Join us for free and you'll be able to:

- › download or order our free information
- › come to our events
- › be a part of our online community
- › borrow equipment through our technology loan service
- › read about other families' experiences in our quarterly magazine and email updates
- › access support.



**National
Deaf Children's
Society**
SCOTLAND

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

Freephone Helpline:

0808 800 8880 (voice and text)

helpline@ndcs.org.uk

www.ndcs.org.uk

Published by the National Deaf Children's Society

© National Deaf Children's Society March 2021

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This publication can be requested in large print or as a text file.

For resource references or to give us your feedback email
informationteam@ndcs.org.uk.

The National Deaf Children's Society is a registered charity in England and Wales
no.1016532 and in Scotland no. SC040779. B0312 May 21.



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