

# Recognising Hearing Loss

## What are the signs of a hearing loss in a baby/toddler?

- The baby starts to babble normally, then stops for no reason
- The baby does not respond to environmental sounds/ appears inattentive
- The baby does not begin to talk at an age when they should (approx. 5-6months-first words)
- Speech and language development seems delayed; they do not use many words

## What are the signs of a hearing loss in a child?

The child with a hearing loss may display some of the characteristics below.

- appear inattentive and naughty
- have difficulty hearing if there is background noise
- cannot locate the source of a sound
- often make speech errors/sentence structure development is not progressing
- speak too loudly or too softly
- need to have sentences/instructions repeated
- turn up the TV or radio
- do not hear or, hear inconsistently at a distance
- misunderstand what is said
- cannot tell the difference between one sound from another
- are falling behind in school
- tend to become withdrawn and quiet in group situations

## How old does a child have to be before they can have a hearing test?

With developing technology, a baby/child can now have a hearing test as young as 2 weeks. All families have the option to have their babies hearing screened now through Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Programs around Australia. However some babies/children may pass this screen and yet a hearing loss may arise later. If families suspect their baby or child has a hearing loss, they should act straight away to have their child's hearing tested. It is important not to delay testing a child's hearing level because if a child does have a hearing loss, that child's speech and language development may be at risk.

## Where can hearing be tested?

Hearing can also be tested by a private audiologist or at a hospital audiology clinic. Ask your doctor for a referral.

For further information about Deaf Children Australia visit our website,  
[www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au](http://www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au)

Helpline 1800 645 916 Email [helpline@deafchildren.org.au](mailto:helpline@deafchildren.org.au)

Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.

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## What happens when hearing loss is identified?

When a hearing loss is identified in a child, the audiologist will give the family folder of information, and refer them to Australian hearing. Some states have Support Staff associated with the Newborn Hearing Screening Program, who can assist with making appointments with Australian Hearing and other support Agencies. In the states where these staff are not available, the audiology clinic may assist in making these appointments, or once the family have attended Australian Hearing, they may assist.

Most deaf children have their hearing needs managed by Australian Hearing. Australian Hearing is funded by the Commonwealth Government and has hearing centres all over Australia. Visit their website at [www.hearing.com.au](http://www.hearing.com.au) to find out more. It is a service provider for ongoing hearing tests and hearing aids for all children up to the age of 26 years. It requires the family to pay an annual subscription fee of approx. \$27, which covers supply and upgrade, service, repairs, insurance and batteries.

The early intervention organisation will tell families about the different communication choices available to them and their child, such as using either/both signing and speech. This will enable the family to choose the most appropriate communication method for their child.

Complete and unbiased information on all types of communication should be provided by the early intervention organisation. If this does not happen, families can approach organisations such as Deaf Children Australia's (DCA) Helpline (details at the end of the article) and ask for assistance in locating the required information.

If the child is of school age, Australian Hearing will send a copy of the audiogram to the school in which your child is enrolled. The school and family should then discuss the most appropriate forms of support and assistance for the child and ensure these are put in place. Again, if you are having trouble locating information on how to ensure your child is fully supported in school, contact the DCA Helpline and appropriate information and support can be provided.

Parents may also link with other parents of deaf children to gain support and advice. Check Deaf Children Australia website or ring the Helpline for information about the different Parent Support Groups available.

Families experience the period of time immediately following finding out their child has a hearing loss in different ways. It is important to note that there are many sources of support and information. Parents are encouraged to seek out this support and ask many questions. Deaf Children Australia can provide families with access to information and referrals to relevant organisations and networks.

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[www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au](http://www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au)

**Helpline** 1800 645 916 **Email** [helpline@deafchildren.org.au](mailto:helpline@deafchildren.org.au)

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## Should I stop trying to talk to my baby if I think they have a hearing loss?

It is extremely important that you continue to talk to your baby even if you think they cannot completely understand you. The more you can engage, talk and play with your baby, the better chance your baby has of developing good speech, language and thus good communication skills. Even if you think your baby may have a hearing loss, keep talking to them. If your baby does have a hearing loss, early intervention organisations will be able to assist you in choosing and developing good strategies in communicating effectively with them as they grow up.

In the meantime, here are some things you can do help with communicating with your baby effectively:

- Move closer to your baby when you talk (i.e. do not call out/talk to them from another room)
- Talk very clearly and put emphasis on the important words in your sentence
- Make sure your baby is watching you and can see your face when you talk
- Use more natural hand gestures than you normally would, e.g. 'would you like a drink?' could include gesturing as if you are having a drink.

## Is it usual for families to be in shock when they are told their child has a hearing loss?

Many families experience a range of emotions when they are told their child has a hearing loss. These feelings may range from shock and denial, to a sense of relief that they have finally found out what was causing them concern. Sometimes families feel they won't be able to cope but it is important to remember that these feelings are normal and it takes time for families to work through these feelings. Deaf Children Australia encourages families to seek as much support as they feel they need.

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## References

### Books

*"Choices" Australian Hearing.*

<http://www.hearing.com.au/fact-sheets>.

This is a free, comprehensive book for parents and carers of children with a hearing loss which been produced by Australian Hearing. This book is highly recommended and is available from your nearest Australian Hearing office.

### Websites

**Identifying hearing loss** - <http://www.eep.org.au>

This is a fantastic website from the "Early Education Program for Hearing Impaired Children" for families who suspect their child has a hearing loss but are unsure what to do next, or for families who have recently had a child diagnosed as deaf/hard of hearing. It also has other families' stories on how they dealt with finding out their child had a hearing loss.

**Hearing Problems in Children** - [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

Direct link to the relevant article;

[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Hearing\\_problems\\_in\\_children?open](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Hearing_problems_in_children?open)

This site discusses hearing problems in children and signs that your baby may have a hearing loss

## Deaf Children Australia's National Helpline Contact Details;

**Free Call from landlines: 1800 645 916**

**Or 03 9539 5300**

**TTY: 03 9510 7143**

**[helpline@deafchildren.org.au](mailto:helpline@deafchildren.org.au)**

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