

# What are the different words used to describe people with hearing loss?

There are many words used to describe deafness. Common terms used to describe deaf people are:

**Culturally Deaf:** this is where the word deaf starts with a capital letter. It means those Deaf people who choose to identify as Deaf people and mix socially within the Deaf community which has its own language (Auslan), culture (deaf way of doing things) and heritage.

**deaf:** (where the word begins with a small 'd') This is a medical term to describe a person who cannot hear. This has become a standard term to describe all types of deaf people. It is often the word used to cover all types of hearing loss – Deaf, deaf, Hard of Hearing and hearing impaired.

**Hard of hearing:** This term is usually used to refer to people who do not use Auslan as their main communication mode. It refers to those people with some hearing, who may or may not use hearing aids. It can also be used as a general term to describe all people with a hearing loss. Often in Australia, it means people whose hearing changes later on in life.

**Hearing impaired:** Like hard of hearing, this means someone who has some hearing and may benefit from hearing aids.

**Partially hearing:** this is similar to "hard of hearing," i.e., a person has some hearing and may benefit from hearing aids.

## What are adventitious deaf or late-deafened people?

These terms refer to people who once had normal hearing but who have lost part or all of their hearing. They are also called postlingually deaf because they have lost hearing after they developed speech and language. Reasons for this might include:

- Accidents
- Illness
- Drugs
- Noise
- Old age.

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 are congenitally deaf people?

This refers to people who have been born deaf or who have lost hearing before speech and language has developed. They are also called prelingually deaf because they are deaf before the development of speech and language. Reasons for this might include:

- Maternal illness
- Drugs – either maternal use or administered after birth
- Genetics
- Unknown

## Is hearing loss in a child the same as a hearing loss in an adult?

An adult acquires a hearing loss after the development of speech and language and will continue to use these skills after the hearing loss occurs. They have skills in communicating with other people. They understand their language fully and use it well. They may be grieving the loss of their previously normal hearing and they are aware of what they are missing out on.

A child with a hearing loss, on the other hand, may need support and assistance to acquire language either through a spoken or sign language. They may, as adults, enter the Deaf community and share its values and culture. They will not be aware of what it is like to have normal hearing.

Some people do not realise the difference in the implications of a hearing loss between a child and an adult.

## References

### Book

*Australian Hearing. "Choices"*

<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. This can be located at their website.

### Websites

#### **National Deaf Children's Society**

NDCS is an excellent UK based website with lots of information on childhood hearing loss. It has a wealth of topics for families to explore.

#### **Deaf Australia**

DA is the peak consumer body of deaf people in Australia. They believe deafness is a difference and deaf people are from a cultural and linguistic minority.

#### **Deafness Forum**

Deafness Forum is a peak body for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired or suffering from chronic ear disorders in Australia. This website has information and links which may be of interest.