

Sensory Consortium Service
Good Outcomes Positive Futures

Approaches to Communication
for Children and Young People with Hearing Loss

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Introduction

Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service (BSCS) recognises the importance of flexibility and informed choice for families when they are considering the communication approach for their child with a hearing loss. The majority of children and young people in Berkshire use an auditory oral approach to communication with a small number choosing the use of sign or a combination of sign and speech.

The Service will support parents in their decision making and work with the family to ensure that their chosen approach is facilitated, leading to the best outcomes for their child. BSCS can provide families of newly identified children with information about different modes of communication. BSCS can also signpost to other organisations, so that families can make a fully informed choice

Regardless of which approach is used it is important that children with hearing loss develop communication skills which will enable them to communicate

effectively and form relationships, to learn about the world, to access learning, to express themselves, and to have the language base to think and develop their ideas. Without some form of communication, a child who is deaf /has a hearing loss may not fully develop their cognitive skills or abilities. The more children are able to learn a language, the more they can understand their world.

In this policy we have included a number of key terms which you may come across when looking at different approaches to communication. The information is taken from a range of sources including the National Deaf Children's Society, the British Deaf Association and the British Association of Teachers Deaf Children and Young People as well as other organisations and gives a brief snapshot of a few key points on different approaches. This is not an exhaustive list.

Approaches to Communication

Different approaches can be grouped into three types

- Listening and speaking (Auditory-Oral or Oral /Aural)
- Sign language as a first language (Sign-Bilingual)
- Total Communication using a combination of methods flexibly

Auditory-oral or oral/aural: Using technology such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, deaf children and young people develop listening and spoken language skills through using their residual hearing with their amplification. Oral language supports the development of English literacy skills (reading and writing) as these are built on an understanding of the sounds and structure of the spoken language.

Lip-reading: This is the ability to read lip patterns. Children and young people who are deaf may naturally pick up lip-reading skills however many speech sounds look the same (for example pat and bat) so it is difficult to rely on lip-reading alone and without a context. It is usually used alongside other communication approaches.

British Sign Language (BSL) and Sign Bilingualism: BSL is a visual language using handshapes, facial expressions, gesture and body language to convey meaning. BSL is an independent and complete language with a unique vocabulary. The structure and grammar is different from written and spoken English. In March 2003, the Government officially recognised BSL as a minority language.

Sign Bilingualism uses BSL as the child's first language and the spoken language of the family is learned as a second language. English is learnt as an additional language.

Sign Supported English (SSE): Sign Supported English or Signs Supporting English (SSE) is a manual support system incorporating signs taken from BSL together with fingerspelling. It is used in English word order to supplement spoken words but you do not sign every word. It aims to clarify the spoken message and lessen ambiguity by using sign support

Signed English (SE): SE is an exact representation of English where a sign is used for every spoken word, usually used in education to develop written and spoken English skills. It is not a language in itself and is not intended for general, spontaneous communication. It is based on British Sign Language and uses markers, generated signs and fingerspelling to reproduce as accurately as possible the grammatical components of English.

Fingerspelling: Each letter of the alphabet is represented using the fingers and palm of the hand. Fingerspelling can be used for signing names or a word without signs.

Makaton: Makaton is a sign system for children and adults (deaf and hearing), with communication and/or learning difficulties (for example, children with Down syndrome). It uses speech with signs (taken originally from BSL) and symbols and is grammar free.

Total Communication (TC) Total Communication uses a variety of methods flexibly – sign, speech and hearing, fingerspelling, gesture, facial expression and lipreading – in whatever combination works best for the child with hearing loss. It is based on the philosophy that children can learn to communicate effectively by using any and all means that they can.

When looking at which approach will be the most appropriate for their child some useful questions for parents to consider are listed below:

- What is the level of my child's hearing loss and how does this impact on access to speech sounds?
- What type of amplification device will my child be using if any i.e. hearing aids, bone conduction aids or cochlear implants?
- What additional support will my family and I need to learn in order to communicate with my child in our chosen approach? (i.e. meaningful two-way conversations and interactions)
- What new skills will we have to learn or develop as a family and what will that involve?
- How will the Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service support my choice of communication approach and how will support be provided?
- How might my choice affect my child's future, in terms of social and educational experiences and opportunities?

More information about how parents are supported by the BSCS to develop their child's communication skills can be found on the BSCS website or from your visiting Teacher of the Deaf and at our pre-school groups.

Note: Positive Language Around Deafness

Moving towards using positive language around Deafness, the Berkshire Sensory Consortium has reviewed their use of positive language and in particular the terms deafness and hearing impairment linked to our support of children and young people. Historically 'hearing impairment' or 'hearing impaired' (HI) has been widely used in deaf education and in services for deaf children however there is a growing conversation around what this should now look like going forward. Currently the terms deaf and deafness are increasingly used within the UK to represent all levels of hearing loss from mild to profound. It is also used to include those who identify culturally as Deaf, hearing impaired, hard of hearing or deafened. Consultation with young people supported by the Service found that they used a range of terminology. To reflect this the Service has decided to use Deafness/ Hearing loss although recognises that within the Code of Practice and in Local Authorities the term

hearing impairment is still current and therefore in some circumstances for reporting this terminology may still be used. The term hearing loss is widely used by the World Health Organisation. As a Service we also feel that young people and their families should be able to choose how their hearing is referred to in for example reports or training within settings and their view will be proactively sought and may change over time.

References

<https://www.ndcs.org.uk/>

<https://bda.org.uk>

<https://www.batod.org.uk/>

<https://www.sense.org.uk>

<https://makaton.org>