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## Why is communication and language important?

The early years of a child's life are important for their development of communication and language skills. Children younger than 7 are learning to express themselves, respond to and communicate with others.

It's important to seek support as early as possible. Research shows that the earlier intervention services begin, the better the outcomes for children. Early intervention often starts when a child is first diagnosed with hearing loss. The earlier there is language (spoken and/or signed) in your child's environment, the sooner their communication, language and literacy can develop.

Early intervention supports are needed for young infants as their brain development benefits from early stimulation. Parents or carers also benefit from the support early intervention provides.

There are many options to help support your child's language and communication. Understanding all the options can help you to work out what is right for your child and family, now and into the future.

## What are supports for language and communication?

### 1. Language and communication

The evidence shows that early intervention improves children's language and communication. There are a range of supports that help develop your child's language and communication skills. There is however limited high-quality evidence about each of these supports and their impact on children's outcomes. The evidence currently suggests there is no best approach when choosing what may suit your child and family's needs.

In all of these approaches, you are usually the main teacher, with support.

#### **Auditory-verbal and oral-aural (spoken language)**

These approaches help your child develop speech and understand spoken language. It usually involves the use of hearing technology, such as a hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. The oral-aural approach involves the added use of lip-reading, facial expression, and gestures.

## **Bilingual or bicultural**

A bilingual approach is where children and families communicate using both English and Auslan. If your family does not already use Auslan you will need to learn it. A bilingual or bicultural approach may also include learning about Deaf and hearing cultures.

## **Sign language**

The sign language of the Deaf community in Australia is Auslan. If you choose to use Auslan with your child it is important for all family members and carers (not just those in the household) to learn it as soon as possible.

Learning Auslan is a long-term commitment for the child and family and fluency is needed for the best outcomes, including social-emotional wellbeing. Children who use Auslan may also use other forms of language and communication (see bilingual approach above).

Other communities in Australia may use different sign languages. For example, Yolŋu Sign Language is used by the Yolŋu community in Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

## **Total communication**

A total communication approach involves a range of communication methods, including many types of signing (including Auslan or key word signing), speaking and listening, lip-reading, gestures, body language and facial expression. Hearing technology and family involvement are important components.

## **Options for children with more than one disability**

- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** involves adding to or replacing a child's speech with other methods of communication such as gestures, objects, pictures, and symbols. Sometimes AAC involves the use of technology, for example speech generating devices.
- **Deaf-blind communication:** include tactile approaches to support a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and who is also blind to access suitable methods of developing language and communication.

## **2. Hearing technology**

Hearing technology such as hearing aids, cochlear implants or other aids and assistive technology can assist your child to hear sounds. Not all children who are deaf or hard of hearing use hearing technology.

Some children use both hearing technology and Auslan. For example, if your child is learning to listen and speak they are likely to use a hearing aid(s) or cochlear implant as part of the program. Some bilingual children may also use a hearing device.

You can access more information about hearing technology options and where to go for supports at [Hearing Australia](#) .

Hearing Australia provide a range of services and supports including:

- Hearing devices and ongoing audiological services.
- Upgraded and replacement speech processors for cochlear implantable devices.
- Repairs and maintenance for devices.

- Ongoing services and support.

Hearing services and devices are usually available through mainstream service systems. Go to [Hearing Australia's policy](#) to learn more about the technology that is provided at no cost to children.

## **Who can you talk to about language and communication supports?**

You can talk to an early childhood partner, providers, early childhood professionals, organisations who support people who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families, peer supports or other friends and family about communication and language supports. [Read more about Questions to ask providers](#)

## **Disclaimer**

This guide is designed to help you understand the supports that may be available to children who are deaf or hard of hearing. It does not imply that a specific support will automatically be included in your child's NDIS plan.

Some supports may be provided outside of the NDIS. All of the supports included in your child's NDIS plan must meet the [NDIS funding criteria](#).

You should read this guide alongside [Our Guideline – Early childhood approach](#) and [Mainstream and community supports](#).