

Deafness and Hearing Loss

Hearing loss may be mild, moderate, severe or profound. It can affect one ear or both ears and leads to difficulty in hearing conversational speech or loud sounds.

There are many people around the world, including in Fiji, with profound hearing loss who communicate using sign language and consider themselves as part of a linguistic and cultural minority group – Deaf people. Deaf people do not think that deafness is a bad thing, nor that it is always a disability. One of the most important things for Deaf people is the ability to learn and communicate in sign language, which is like speaking a different language. Fiji has its own sign language.

People who are hard of hearing or experience mild to severe hearing loss usually communicate through spoken language and can benefit from hearing aids and assistive listening devices.

People who are Deaf or hard of hearing are sometimes mistaken for having low intelligence. Hearing loss does not lower intelligence. Deaf people and people who are hard of hearing can study and work in successful careers like their peers. However, they may need additional supports like sign language interpreters and other reasonable accommodations such as additional time during examinations.

"All schools shall promote fair and equitable access to education for all learners with disabilities regardless of their gender, age, social status, economic background, geographical location, race, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation and gender identity, or intersections between these factors."

(MoE, Special and Inclusive Education Policy)

Some signs of deafness or hearing loss are:

- Difficulty following conversations or responding to sound
- Delayed speech and language development
- Talking very softly or very loudly
- May appear withdrawn, stubborn or disobedient
- Turning their head to one side or placing their hand around the ear when listening
- Delayed response to instructions or requiring visible prompting or gestures to understand.

It is vitally important for children who may have hearing loss to have a professional hearing assessment. If you suspect your child may have difficulty hearing, contact Project Heaven or the Frank Hilton Organisation.

Additional resource:

"Helping Children Who Are Deaf – family and community support for children who do not hear well" (Online book) Hesperian Foundation.

<http://bit.ly/3YnJgUE>

"Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education."

(Fiji Constitution)

Who can help? Your nearest health centre, the hospital in your division and your community health worker. For hearing assessment <https://www.frankhilton.org.fj/> and for hearing and vision screening <https://www.facebook.com/officialProHeaven/>. For additional help Gospel School for the Deaf.

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Please note that this document is for informational/education purposes only and does not replace medical advice.



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