

DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS

Produced as part of the *Toolkit for Disability-Inclusive Education - Fiji*

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Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education (Fiji Constitution)

All children should be given the opportunity to learn together wherever possible, regardless of difficulties, disabilities or differences (Fiji Ministry of Education Policy on Special and Inclusive Education)

A person who is not able to hear as well as someone with normal hearing is said to have hearing loss. It 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 another complete language. Fiji has its own sign language.

People with 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 can study and work in successful careers such as teachers, lawyers, business people amongst many other things.

Who can help? Fiji Association of the Deaf, Gospel School for the Deaf, Hilton Special School, Lautoka School for Special Education, Project Heaven (hearing and vision screening), CWM Hospital, district hospitals, Community Rehabilitation Assistants.

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- May appear withdrawn, stubborn or disobedient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.

It is vitally important for children who may have deafness or hearing loss to have a professional hearing assessment. If you suspect your child may have difficulty hearing, contact the district health service.

Additional resource:

“Helping Children Who Are Deaf – family and community support for children who do not hear well”. Available in electronic form on the CD in the Toolkit for Disability-Inclusive Education, at schools across Fiji.