

# Empowering parents for disability inclusive teaching

**A resource for parents**

This resource offers a guide to parents on how to teach and support children with disabilities at home.

**Developed by the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) Project**

The aim of the TEDI (Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion) project is to empower teachers to provide quality education for learners with severe to profound disabilities (SPD). This is now being expanded to parents. This guide gives an overview of different kinds of disabilities and approaches. If you want more detail around a specific disability there are links to our online courses at the end of this document. This guide includes YouTube links to videos from the online courses.

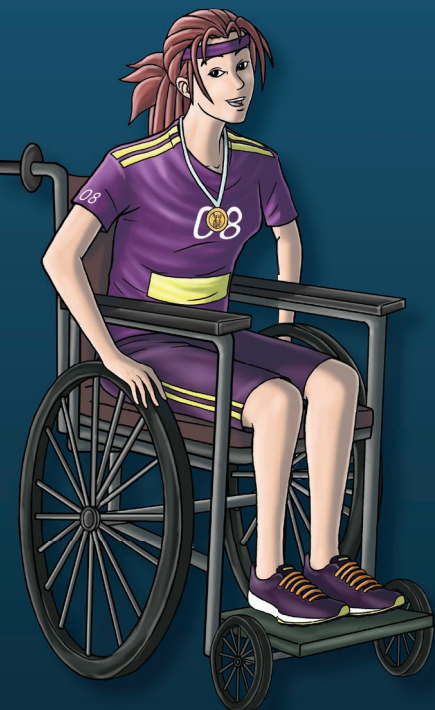
**Creating an empowering teaching environment**

## **Human rights and social justice issue**

People with disabilities have generally been excluded from society. Because they were often seen as being “less human” than others or that there is something “wrong” with their bodies. However, we believe this not to be the case. Disability is more about social experiences of injustice and discrimination rather than about how people’s bodies work. It is the human right (and a social justice issue) of all people with disabilities to have full participation in life.

## **Promote resilience**

We want our children to be resilient i.e. to be able to thrive or do well in life despite negative experiences. We are resilient when we actively look for things in our environment that will support us. This can include social, cultural, psychological and physical factors that will promote our well-being. By providing children with a loving and supportive home environment, we can thus help them become more resilient.



# Empowering parents for disability inclusive teaching

## Creating an empowering teaching environment

### Holistic approach

We use a holistic approach that takes into account children's physical, psychological, social, and spiritual, well-being. We make use of an international convention on the rights of people with disabilities developed by the United Nations. This convention says that "Education should lead to the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential." We also draw on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, meaning "I am because we are". This means we are all connected to each other and we all need to care for and support each other.

## Fostering inclusivity

Every child sees, hears, speaks, moves, understands, organizes, engages, and remembers differently. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a teaching framework that emphasises the unique way each child learns. UDL can guide you to provide variety in three important aspects of your child's learning: the 'why', 'how', and 'what' they learn.

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The 'why' of learning is about what motivates your child and what they are interested in. You can find ways of linking lessons to your child's interests to keep them inspired to learn more.

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The 'how' of learning is about how your child would prefer to express themselves - in writing, orally, or through movement. Let your child choose how they want to demonstrate their new knowledge.

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The 'what' of learning is about how your child wants information presented – as text, audio, or pictures. Experiment with different ways of sharing information with your child to see which ways they are most comfortable with.

## Education and care

Education does not just happen in formal education settings; learning can happen anywhere and everywhere. For children with severe to profound intellectual disabilities, education happens through care. We can help them learn everyday by speaking to them about their environment or just by caring for their daily needs. When we care for children with disabilities, we can teach them through how we interact physically with them and how we use language to teach them new concepts. Learning does not only need to happen at a school setting but can happen in a child's own home or community that they live in.



# Children with visual impairment

## Understanding visual impairment

Visual impairment ranges from no vision, which is very rare, to restricted vision that does not allow people to use text, to low vision where the child is able to read text by using magnification and large print. Every child with visual impairment will see the world in a different way. When you are familiar with your child's type of vision loss, you will understand their ideal lighting requirements, how glare and contrast affects their vision, and you can help them to navigate their learning more effectively. More importantly however, be aware of your child's unique passions, skills, and strengths and build and expand on these as much as possible. Remember that your child simply has a different sensory experience of the world around them; they still have the wonderful curiosity, mischievousness, and glee that come natural to all children.

## Impact on learning

### How visual impairment may affect learning:

- Visual impairment affects children's range and variety of experiential learning. Experiential learning refers to how sighted babies watch and visually organise their world. Even before they learn to crawl, they categorize objects in their environment as large, small, same or different, rough or smooth, etc. They also start making attempts to touch objects that are out of arm's reach. Children with visual impairment need their caregivers around them to help them experience and access objects and situations that sighted children experience through sight.
- Visually impaired children need to develop alternative skills using their other senses to access their learning material. For example, they might need to learn how to read and write in Braille, use optical devices with standard print, or use auditory input.
- Visual impairment affects children's personal daily living and social skills. These include reading facial expressions, developing positive social interactions, food preparation, personal care, and hygiene. Sighted children learn such skills by watching those around them. As parents, you can find ways to help your child develop daily living and social skills through being aware of and using your everyday home environment and interactions.



# Children with visual impairment

## How you can help as a parent

It is estimated that 80% of information is taken in through vision, so we need to teach children with visual impairment what sighted children learn incidentally, just by seeing what is around them. Children with visual impairment need to be taught these things deliberately. We can teach them to explore tangible materials and objects through touch and by giving them verbal cues. This will take time and practice.

### Here are some ways you can adapt your child's learning material:

- For pictures or diagrams you can use a putty-like sticky material, such as Prestik, to mold it into the shape of the picture or diagram to make it tangible. Only make the most important aspects of the picture or diagram tangible.
- Write a detailed description of a picture and all the information that is given in the picture and read it or record it for your child to listen to.
- Replace a picture or diagram with a real item or model to enhance perceptual understanding.
- Use as many real-life objects and experiences as you can and narrate important information that would otherwise be accessed through sight

These approaches are all suggestions. What is more important, is to meet the individual needs of your child and to help them grow into their unique passions, skills, and strengths.





# Deaf Children

## Deaf with a capital D

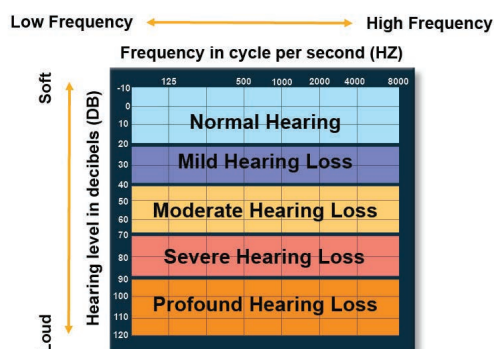
Like all children, every Deaf child is unique. Their communication and language needs may vary considerably, even with audiograms that look similar (more about audiograms coming up). It's important to note that the terms we use to describe our children's medical diagnosis must be done with caution to not fuel the flame toward negative stereotypes of disability. In this resource, we write Deaf with a capital D. This refers to the group of people who have a hearing loss but also identify culturally and linguistically as Deaf. Deaf culture and identity are made up of a set of social beliefs, behaviours, traditions, history, and values. Deaf people mainly use sign language to communicate. We encourage parents of Deaf children to use the term "Deaf gain". This means that part of having hearing loss, your family has also gained an extended family in the Deaf community, your child can explore a new part of their identity as a Deaf person, and has also gained new language in sign language.

## Impact on learning

The measure of hearing is the audiogram which shows how loud a sound needs to be at different pitch levels for the child to hear the sound - thus the audiogram indicates their hearing loss according to thresholds. It's worth understanding your child's audiogram and their hearing thresholds to know how to best respond to their communication and language needs. For example:

- Children with mild hearing loss can miss up to 50% of a discussion and miss out on incidental learning opportunities.
- Children with severe hearing loss will need hearing aids in order to detect speech and environmental sounds.
- Children with profound hearing loss will need language intervention to learn to communicate with others, whether in sign language or spoken language. Without early intervention, children show significant delays in language, social, and academic skills.

Contact your child's audiologist for an explanation of their audiogram. You can also include your child in the conversations to help them understand their own audiograms. This promotes independence and allows them to be involved in the decisions about managing their residual hearing and communication needs.



# Deaf Children

## How you can help as a parent

### You can help your child hear better by improving your audibility:

- Be aware of the quality, loudness, and clarity of your voice
- Decrease distance between you and your child
- Decrease or eliminate background noises

### You can help your child's language development by:

- Repeating lessons – repetition helps with retention
- Adding written notes to reinforce spoken or signed instruction
- Adding visual aids to lessons

### Ways you can make learning easier for your child:

- Be patient with your child; it is frustrating and tiring to have a hearing loss in a world full of sounds.
- Ensure that you and others are easy to see and in good lighting so that your child can easily lip-read or use sign language.
- Allow time for your child to take in any visual information before continuing with the lesson – don't expect them to look at something while you talk or sign.
- Ensure that all educational videos have subtitles or closed captions.
- Provide adapted worksheets with adjusted language and additional language prompts.
- Be aware of your child's learning pace and focus on the most important aspects of the curriculum so that you don't spend time and energy unnecessarily.
- Make an effort to learn sign language if this is the chosen way for your child to communicate. If you want to have an ongoing close relationship with your child then you need to be able to communicate with them. If your child has already learned some sign language, ask them to teach you.



# Children with intellectual disabilities

## Overview of Intellectual Disability

Someone living with an intellectual disability has an impairment in intelligence or cognition so that they experience a lot of difficulty in understanding new and complex information and in learning to apply new skills. This affects the person's ability to cope independently in the full range of activities of daily living, such as eating, dressing and household chores. Many of the causes of intellectual disability are due to multiple factors that may also interact with each other so that each person with an intellectual disability is unique. We recognise that every person with an intellectual disability can learn, even if it is differently or to a different extent than typically developing peers. All persons with intellectual disability have a right to receive the best support to meet their learning needs, whilst building on their strengths and understanding their weaknesses. The child with intellectual disability is able to do more with the right support than when left to figure things out on their own. As they practice new tasks with the help of another person, they can start to do more themselves and develop their own independent skills.

## Impact on learning

When understanding Learning or Developmental areas for children with severe to profound intellectual disability we need to keep the following in mind:

- **Physical or body needs such as:**
  - Gross and fine motor skills: big and small muscle movements
  - Sensory-motor skills: the body's senses and movements
- **Cognitive or mental ability includes:**
  - Understanding everyday objects
  - Understanding concepts like the body, colours, shapes, patterns, numbers
  - Being able to have some memory and concentration skills
- **Social skills include:**
  - Communicate to understand others or express themselves
  - Sharing and engaging socially with others
  - Social-emotional abilities, like expressing emotions appropriately to individuals or in groups
- **Functional ability include everyday activities of living:**
  - Eating, dressing, toileting, bathing
  - Playing appropriately with objects or people and playing with purpose or meaning

# Children with intellectual disabilities

## How you can help as a parent

Play is the most effective way to support a young child's development and wellbeing. When we play we give children time to engage with activities to help with their development. We learn through playing with movement, touch, objects or toys, songs, smiles, and using body language. Play allows children with severe to profound intellectual disability to create and explore the world and conquer their fears.

### Some things you can do as a parent:

- Set up a daily programme that exposes your child to different concepts, objects, and settings.
- Allow your child to give input on their preferences: what they want to wear, what toy they want to play with.
- Make mealtimes interactive through using different coloured utensils, describe food items with expression (“apples are round and sour”), provide opportunities for them to assist in feeding themselves where possible.
- Involve your child in activities as far as possible rather than just letting them be an onlooker.

When you have extra time at home with your child, make an effort to do chores with him or her. At the beginning you can give them a lot of support and help but then encourage them to take over more and more. You will find that your child enjoys helping the family. Praising your child for their contribution will also help to build their self-esteem.



The content in this resource is drawn from four short courses aimed at empowering teachers for disability inclusion. The courses are developed as part of the TEDI project and they are hosted on Coursera:

[Disability Inclusion in Education: Building Systems of Support](#)

[Educating Deaf Children: Becoming an Empowered Teacher](#)

[Severe to Profound Intellectual Disability: Circles of Care and Education](#)

[Teaching Children with Visual Impairment: Creating Empowering Classrooms](#)