



Hearing loss in children

Signs and symptoms

There are various types of hearing loss, but they all refer to a partial, or total inability to hear. Learners may either present with a congenital hearing loss, or an acquired hearing loss, which may be due to illness or an accident. Hearing loss can be in one or both ears; it can be temporary or permanent, and it occurs at different severities. The impact of hearing loss can affect a learner's ability to learn. Many learners with hearing loss may find the acoustics in a classroom challenging.

A learner who cannot hear well will struggle to keep up, may get restless and act out in class, or disengage from lessons. Unfortunately, this may lead to getting screened for and diagnosed with other conditions, such as learning disabilities, ADHD etc. Eventually, this can affect their self-esteem, too, leading to behavioural problems. They also miss out on the opportunity to learn language incidentally, through overhearing. This will result in learners presenting with poor vocabulary and limited world knowledge.

Signs and Symptoms: Speech disorders:

“As a child hears, so s/he speaks”. Learners with a hearing loss will have numerous pronunciation errors in their speech and may leave out parts of words because they cannot hear them well. This is particularly evident in high frequency sound which are soft, like (ch, f, k, p, s, sh, t and th), which make up a lot of the grammatical markers in English, like plurals, possessive pronouns etc and some of the other subtle nuances of language. The inability to hear and discriminate different speech sounds will also impact a learner's literacy, spelling, reading, and writing as well as phonemic awareness skill development.



Auditory closure:

This refers to the ability to complete distorted or missing parts of words to recognize the message in its entirety based on your world knowledge, it is executed on a daily basis and people with hearing within normal limits do this subconsciously. E.G. I stir my tea with a _ _oon. This skill relies on one's background knowledge and knowledge of the world. A learner with a hearing loss is unable to use their auditory closure skills.

Social challenges

It is difficult for learners with a hearing loss to make friends in class, because classmates whisper and chat during class sometimes, and a child with an untreated hearing loss will miss out on this. This may cause them to feel left out and isolated, and not really connected to any of their peers. They may also be embarrassed by their inability to hear.

Behavioural challenges

Learners with untreated hearing loss may “act out” and be labelled as naughty because they are frustrated at not being able to hear and participate in classroom activities and interactions. The teacher may think that they are being disobedient because they will not carry out any given instructions, due to not having heard them. They may sometimes be thought of as less intelligent than their peers because they are not able to do and complete classwork. This is because of having to rely on lip reading and visual cues to follow instructions and taught material, and by the time they start writing, the teacher has moved on to the next topic. They may then feel like they are always being left behind and will struggle to “keep up”.

They may also refuse to wear hearing devices as hearing loss is mostly associated with old age in society.

Listening effort and fatigue

The listening effort and resultant fatigue will impact a student's ability to follow long conversations and remember information/instructions. The increased cognitive load will impact a student's ability to follow multi-step instructions, pay attention, and may affect note taking.