

# Hearing Impairment (HI)

## Hearing Impairment

Hearing is one of our five senses. Hearing is a very important sense because it gives us access to sounds in the world around us like voices, music, airplanes overhead, car horns, and dogs barking. When a child has a hearing loss, it is cause for immediate attention because language and communication skills develop most rapidly in childhood, especially before the age of 3. When hearing loss goes undetected, children are delayed in developing those skills. That is why newborns are screened for hearing loss within hours of birth. Catching a hearing loss early means that treatment can start early as well and help the child develop communication and language skills that will last a lifetime.

Each year more than 12,000 babies are born with hearing loss, and the cause is often unknown. Profound deafness occurs in approximately 4-11 per 10,000 children; in at least 50% of these cases, the cause is genetic.

## Types of Hearing Loss

Sound is measured by: a) its loudness or intensity (measured in units called decibels, dB); and b) its frequency or pitch (measured in units called hertz, Hz). Measuring hearing loss depends on how well a person can hear the loudness (dB) or frequencies (Hz) most strongly associated with speech. Hearing impairments can occur in both ears, but usually occur only in one. Generally, only children whose hearing loss is greater than 90 decibels (dB) are

considered deaf. Causes of hearing loss and deafness are categorized in two areas: acquired, meaning that the loss occurred after birth due to illness or injury; or congenital, which means that the hearing loss or deafness was present at birth. The most common acquired hearing loss occurs in the acquired category and includes such causes as build-up of fluid behind the eardrum, ear infections, childhood diseases like mumps, measles, or chicken pox, or head trauma. Causes of congenital hearing loss or deafness include a family history of hearing loss, infections or complications during pregnancy, or is a characteristic of another disability such as Down syndrome or Treacher Collins syndrome. A hearing loss can happen when any part of the ear is not working in the usual way. This includes the outer ear, middle ear, inner ear, hearing (acoustic) nerve, and auditory system.

Hearing Sensitivity 0 to 15 dB
Minimal or Slight Hearing Loss 16 to 25 dB
Mild Hearing Loss 26 to 40 dB
Moderate Hearing Loss 41 to 55 dB
Moderately Severe Hearing Loss 56 to 70 dB
Severe Hearing Loss 71 to 90 dB
Profound Hearing Loss 91 dB or greater

A hearing loss of any type and degree is problematic. A minimal or slight hearing loss (15 dB HL) may not be a problem for an adult who has the ability to focus on and share meaning with the speaker, but a minimal hearing impairment can seriously affect the overall development of a child



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who is in the process of learning language, developing communication skills, and acquiring knowledge.

Signs of hearing loss to watch for in a child include:

- Concern by a family member or teacher that a child is not quick to hear things
- Difficulty with paying attention and behaving
- Difficulty with academic performance
- Frequent use of "what?" or "huh?"
- Intently watching the faces of speakers
- Sitting close to the TV when the volume is loud enough for others; increasing the volume on the TV or other audio electronics to unreasonably loud levels
- Not responding to voices over the telephone or continually switching ears when on the phone
- Not "jumping" or becoming startled by sudden, loud noises
- Unable to accurately figure out where a sound is coming from

## Help is Available

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Yes, help is available to your child, and it begins with a free evaluation for special services. The IDEA, the nation's special education law, requires that all children suspected of having a disability be evaluated without cost to their parents to determine if they have a disability and, because of that disability, need special education services under IDEA. It is important to understand that a medical diagnosis does not mean the same as

having a disability in education. Those special services are:

**Early Intervention**-a system of services to support infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth through 2) and their families. If a child is found eligible for Early Intervention services, staff work with you to develop what is known as an Individualized Family Services Plan or IFSP, which will describe your child's unique needs as well as the services he will receive to address those needs. Contact Alabama Early Intervention Services at 1-800-543-3098.

**Special Education and Related Services**-Services available through the public school system for school-aged children, including preschoolers (ages 3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability.

## REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

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If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating your concerns, and request that an evaluation be conducted. The referral team will meet with you to review existing data and parental concerns to determine if evaluation is necessary. If the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed, and you must give written consent for the



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evaluation to be done. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted, written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the problem-solving team.

Keep in mind that a child does not have to be failing to be eligible for special education services. A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.

*AAC 290-8-9.03(5)(a)*

(Alabama Administrative Code)

Definition:

Hearing Impairment means impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. **This term includes both deaf and hard-of-hearing.**

An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, a comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs.

The initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

- 1-does my child have a disability?
- 2-does his disability affect his educational performance?
- 3-does my child need special education and related services?

Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as “**a child with a disability**” under special education laws. Your child must meet the criteria listed for Hearing Impairment using certain minimum evaluative components. The evaluative components include passing a visual screening, and Audiological evaluation where the data indicates the child has a hearing impairment. There must be performance measures such as group or individual intelligence scores, individual education achievement and/or diagnostic tests, classroom observation, and review of the child's existing records (health, attendance). Evidence must show educational performance is adversely affected by the disability.

*AAC 290-8-9.02(1)(q)*

(Alabama Administrative Code)

Further states that:

Children with special needs, such as those who have significant communication needs, limited English proficiency, hearing impairments, visual impairments, multiple disabilities, language impairments, physical impairments, etc., must be administered evaluations appropriately developed and/or modified for their needs.

## EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Hearing loss or deafness does not affect a person's intellectual capacity or ability to learn. However, children with hearing loss usually require some form of special education services in order to receive an adequate education. Such services may include:



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- Regular speech, language, and auditory training from a specialist
- Amplification system
- Services of an interpreter for students who use sign language
- Captioned films/videos
- Assistance of a note taker so the student with hearing loss can fully attend to instruction
- Counseling
- Accessible instructional materials, including Braille
- Assistive technology devices and instruction of use

Children who are hard of hearing have a difficult time learning vocabulary, grammar, word order, idiomatic expressions, and other aspects of verbal communication. For students who are deaf, consistent and conscious use of visible communication modes (such as sign language, fingerspelling, and Cued Speech) and/or amplification and aural/oral training can help reduce this language delay.



## Determining Eligibility

When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, provided at the school's expense. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as **"a child with a disability"** and determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child. Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child



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is denied eligibility for services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to appeal this decision and should inform the school. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. If the child is not eligible for services under IDEA, he or she may be eligible for services under a different law called Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Students with 504 Plans could benefit from accommodations and assistive technology. Ask the school how to access 504 services for your child, if you feel they are needed. You can also contact our staff for assistance.



## Resources

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Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services, age 3-21. [www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/](http://www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/)

Alabama Early Intervention Services, Birth-age 2. <http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/early-intervention>

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind <https://www.aidb.org/>

Children's Rehabilitation Service <http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/childrens-rehabilitation-service>

Alabama Medicaid EPSDT <http://www.medicaid.alabama.gov/>

Better Hearing Institute, publications on Children's Hearing Issues <http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing-loss-children>

American Society for Deaf Children <http://deafchildren.org/>

## YOUR OPINION MATTERS

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**Stakeholder opinion** is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPT>

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## APEC IS HERE TO HELP

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