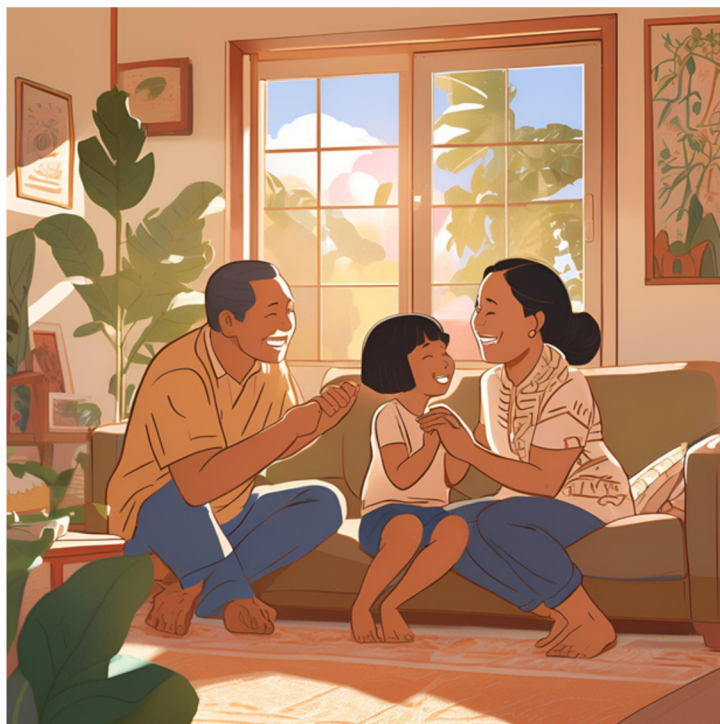


HE ARATOHU MŌ NGĀ MĀTUA **PARENT/CAREGIVER GUIDE**

Weaving a strong language foundation for
d/Deaf and hard of hearing children



This guide is intended to help parents / caregivers of d/Deaf and hard of hearing children navigate their journey with up-to-date research on language options for their whānau.

Dedication

This resource is dedicated to all d/Deaf and hard of hearing people.

Authorship

This resource was adapted from Language First's Parent Guide (<https://language1st.org/parent-guide>) by the Advocating for Deaf Children's Language team (Dr Jayne Newbury, Caelyn Eades, Rosie Lamb and Anita Boon) for the culture and context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

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Feedback and updates

Please direct feedback to jayne.newbury@canterbury.ac.nz.

This resource will be updated as new research and perspectives come to be known.

Images

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MY CHILD IS DEAF...

HOW WILL THEY COMMUNICATE?

He whāriki hei whakamana i te mokopuna, hei kawae i ngā wawata

A whāriki (woven mat) that empowers the child and carries our aspirations

Kia ora! This is a guide to current knowledge on providing language opportunities for your whānau. This guide is based on te whāriki (woven mat) model.

“Whāriki and raranga have symbolic and spiritual meaning for Māori. Weaving a whāriki takes knowledge, skill, and time. It is almost always done collaboratively. When finished, an intricately woven whāriki is a taonga valued for its artistry and kaupapa. Pasifika share with Māori the tradition of weaving whāriki, using techniques and patterns that are specific to their particular Pacific Island nation.”
(Ministry of Education, 2017)

The information presented here can help you design te whāriki you want as a foundation for your whānau (family) - the weaving of the mat is like weaving all the different opportunities your child has access to, this allows your child to flourish and thrive in all aspects of their life.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

He taonga te mokopuna, kia whāngaia, kia tipu, kia rea

A child is a treasure, to be nurtured, to grow, to flourish

Language is so much more than just learning to communicate with others. Language is the link to our cultures and the foundation of thinking.



Children need to have full access to at least one language. This builds a foundation for children to connection with the community, as well as to facilitate later academic skills (e.g., learning to read).

A d/Deaf or hard of hearing child needs at least one strong accessible language in their preschool years. This gives them a foundation of language to use to think, learn, speak, listen, and learn maths, reading, and writing skills. A strong language foundation makes it easier to learn another language.

You can learn new languages as an adult, including a signed language. You don't need to be fluent to help your child to learn it; you just need to learn at a slightly faster pace than your child and give them regular access to people who are fluent.

NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE (NZSL)

NZSL is a natural language with its own grammar. Anything you can express in a spoken language can be equally expressed in NZSL. It is a visual language (using hand movements, facial expressions etc.) and does not have a written form.

Hand-on-hand sign languages are also used by many Deaf/Blind children and adults. Some people also use types of manual fingerspelling to communicate.

There are a lot of online resources and in-person classes available to support you to learn NZSL. There may even be funding towards class available. The Deaf community will be welcoming and pleased to meet your child.

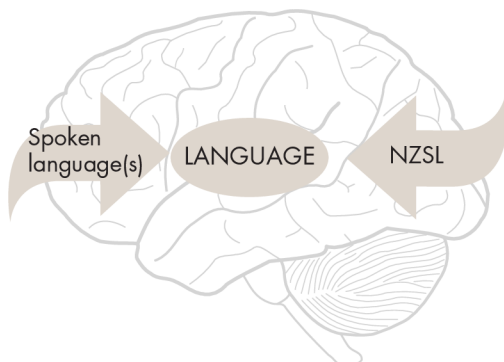
LISTENING DEVICES

Listening devices (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants, etc.) are tools that improve access to spoken languages. It is easier for infants than older d/Deaf children/adults to learn to use sound effectively. Re-training the brain to use sound information can be very difficult if they haven't heard sound in the first 4 years of life.

ACCESS TO LANGUAGE

He kai aku ringa. | *The food in our hands.*

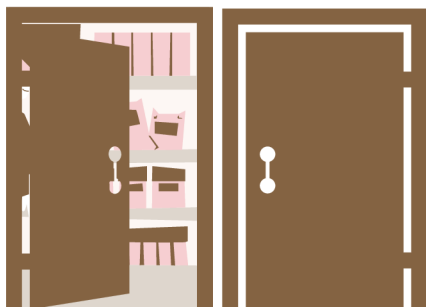
Full access to language means all the information can go into the brain.



This image was adapted with permission from Language First (www/language1st.org)

LANGUAGE IS LIKE FOOD FOR THE BRAIN

Imagine two pantry doors:



One door always opens easily. You can always get enough food to eat.

The other door doesn't and sticks part way. Some days you can't get enough food out of the pantry! These days you go hungry.

What matters is that you get enough food, not which pantry door you use.

In a similar way, a d/Deaf child can't always access spoken language, but they can always see you sign.

Providing only spoken language input is a risky option, as only part of the language input gets into their brain.

LONG LASTING EFFECT

For infants and toddlers, missing small bits of language here and there adds up. It has a cumulative negative impact. If a preschooler doesn't get enough language experience, their brain doesn't wire for language learning well. This can permanently alter the brain's ability to learn and process language.

If any of these are true, your child does not have full access:

- Your child can hear most (but not all) sounds
 - e.g., they hear "book" instead of "books"
- Your child struggles to hear in background noise
- Your child struggles to follow spoken conversations at dinnertime

Also consider that your child can't wear their listening device all the time (e.g. in the water/bath time, flat batteries, broken equipment, bed time and listening breaks). How will they access language then?

LANGUAGE AS A LINK TO CULTURE

Having access to language from an early age helps develop your child's understanding of who they are. This includes your family culture(s) and Deaf culture.

By connecting with the Deaf community, you will increase your understanding of your child's experience of the world. Deaf adults can be language and cultural models for you and your child, and support you all to connect with NZSL.



Turangawaewae: A place to stand, to call their own

LISTENING TO DEAF PEOPLE

My hearing mum learnt a sign language when I was 4½. It was her third language and my first accessible language. She still is not as fluent as me in sign language and English today, but she made sure I had deaf adults and peers around me when growing up. That made a huge difference. It's ok not to be perfect with signing but I love that my mum signs for me. I am grateful that she learnt sign language to make my life a bit less stressful.

Erika - a Deaf adult

I am an oral success. I ... eventually got a Ph.D. from a hearing university. But in the mainstream, I always felt alone. I was bullied, shunned, and quietly ignored. This, you call a success?

Donald, a Deaf adult

... just give all the languages.

They need to be given sign language straight away, day one. At the same time as speech, so the parents can be learning sign language while their child is a baby. It may be awkward and hard at first, but that doesn't matter... as their child grows, the NZSL in the family grows too.

Mary - a Deaf adult

That level of access that I got early on [with sign language] allowed me to have language, which allowed me to have learning, which then allowed me to have identity. Those are all connected; without sign language, I wouldn't be who I am today... but without my cochlear implant, I wouldn't be who I am now"

Grace - a Deaf adult

Offer **ALL** resources to your child from the very beginning and then allow them to choose what works best for them, not what works best or is more convenient for everyone else.

Amber - a Deaf adult

My parents are strong Te Reo speakers, but I can't speak Te Reo because I went to school and I wasn't allowed to sign, I wasn't allowed to speak Te Reo, I had to be oral and speak English. So I really missed out on a lot, so I feel like I'm catching up on my learning."

Milton - a Turi Deaf adult

It's really important that they build up a foundation of confidence in themselves, whatever language they are using, spoken or sign, it's so important that they are sure of themselves. It's a good way to accept their identity, or that part of their identity.

James - a Deaf adult

I never learned sign language until a late age, because I was involved with the hearing world, which was hard. When I met Deaf friends... they taught me to sign and from there I was so grateful to learn sign language... where it is easy to communicate and it is who I am. It was huge difference between two worlds.

Julie - a Deaf adult

I can speak but the downside is that because I can talk, people think I can hear well, so that's not helpful at all. A positive is that I can support other Deaf people with their communication. But I wish that I'd had more sign growing up. We need to become capable communicators with a variety of people.

Paula - a Deaf adult

COMMON MYTHS

Myth	Facts
You (parent/family) are bad at learning languages or you are too old to learn another language	<p>You only need to be one step ahead of your child. You might find with the right teacher and trying different methods, that you do very well. Adults are also good at learning languages (think how long it will take your baby to learn 10 new words compared to you).</p> <p>Deaf community members will also support you and your whānau (family). They can provide good language models for you all to learn NZSL.</p>
NZSL and American Sign Language (ASL) are the same	Just as there are many spoken languages (e.g., English, Māori, Hindi, Tongan...) there are many different sign languages. Pick which language is used in your community (it is NZSL in NZ).
Learning NZSL will prevent d/Deaf children from learning a spoken language	Learning more than one language does not slow the broad milestones of language development. Not all d/Deaf children thrive when they only learn a spoken language. A good foundation in NZSL will actually help them learn spoken languages. Remember they need access to good models of all the languages they are learning.
Your child isn't deaf enough to need NZSL	Learning NZSL and connecting to Deaf communities will be beneficial for all d/Deaf and hard of hearing children. There will be many times that your child will have difficulty hearing (e.g., in noise). Your child's hearing may also change over time.
Listening devices "correct" or fix their hearing	Listening devices have limitations and will not replicate typical ("normal") hearing abilities.
Deaf children can lip read to access spoken language	Lip reading only does not provide full access to spoken language. There are many sounds that can't be seen on the face (e.g. you can't see the difference between "g" and "k"). This means your child will miss important information if relying on lip reading.

BILINGUALISM IN ACTION

Aiming to teach your child to communicate effectively.

SCENARIO 1

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Speaking to child in English while getting ready for bed.

DEAF CHILD:

removes listening devices and climbs into bed

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Sits next to child and signs a book in NZSL, making sure the child can see their signs and the pages

SCENARIO 2

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

你今天在學校學了什麼?
(Mandarin - what did you learn at school today?)

DEAF CHILD:

Starts to respond in Mandarin and then switches to NZSL mid-sentence

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Signs “keep going” encouraging child to tell them more in NZSL.

SCENARIO 3

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Nana i kai te aporo?
(Te Reo Māori - who ate the apple?)

DEAF CHILD:

no response

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Taps child to make sure they’re looking. In NZSL, “did-you-understand?”

DEAF CHILD:

Shakes head

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Repeats in NZSL

SCENARIO 4

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Vaai i lena moa (Samoan - look at that chicken!)

DEAF CHILD:

○ le ā? (Samoan - what?)

PARENT/CAREGIVER:

Signs “chicken, there” in NZSL
If you don't know the sign, gesture (make it visual) and fingerspell it.

WHAT WILL YOUR WHĀNAU'S WHĀRIKI (MAT) LOOK LIKE?

How will you weave together all of the different opportunities for your child to flourish and thrive? Raising a child is a journey. It is okay for it to change and evolve over time.

Being Deaf is a unique experience, which hearing people don't fully understand. It is important that hearing parents listen to Deaf people as part of making decisions. For Deaf people, signed languages are a natural, effortless way to communicate. Embracing NZSL and Deaf culture contributes to a positive outlook on d/Deafness, and it can be empowering for your whole whānau (family).

We don't have enough research to know which option(s) are best for your individual d/Deaf child. Different research studies look at the options differently and don't consider every way that your family is unique. This means that different studies give slightly different recommendations. Overall, research suggests there is no disadvantage to learning a signed language and there are many potential benefits, including developing a vital early language foundation and sense of connection or belonging with the Deaf community.

Whichever options you choose, your child needs full access to at least one language in their first 4 years. A solid language foundation will wire the brain for learning more. If you want your child to use a spoken language, your child also needs early access to sound to learn to listen.

Many Deaf adults suggest giving your child both signed and spoken language options from the start, and see what works for them!

Ko te ahurei o te whānau ārahia o tātou mahi

Let the uniqueness of the family guide our work

PHILOSOPHY CHECKLIST

Your child's team are the people who support them to thrive. This includes yourself, your whānau, and professionals.

Use this resource to reflect their beliefs about language, as well as what you want for your child. This can help you find the best supports for these goals.

My child's team:

Believes it is best our child focus only on learning NZSL or hand-on-hand signing

Encourages my child's sign alongside spoken languages(s), and uses them with my child

Believes it is best our child focus only on learning to listen and speak



Actively supports my child to communicate effectively, however works best for them

Has neutral feelings about Deaf children needing to 'fit into' a hearing world

Believes that Deaf children need to be 'fixed'



Encourages and supports all my child's culture(s) and language(s)

Has neutral feelings about multilingualism and multiculturalism

Believes it's best my child speaks only English and fits in with the mainstream culture



As your child grows, beliefs and goals may change. It may be helpful to return here and reflect on these in the future. While reflecting on these, it is also good to reflect on how well your child is supported, growing, and thriving.

WHICH PROFESSIONALS ARE IN YOUR CHILD'S TEAM?

Waiho i te toipoto, kaua i te toiroa | *Let us keep close together, not far apart*

It is important to consider who is on your team in supporting your child's language journey. Here are some key New Zealand services for d/Deaf children.

WHO?	WHAT?	WHERE?
Advisors on Deaf children (AoDCs)	Support whānau through your child's journey from birth until year 3 at school. AoDCs can help guide you through navigating information, connect you to services and advocate for your child's/family's needs.	Employed by the Ministry of Education. Your audiologist can refer you to AoDC services.
Audiologists	These professionals test your child's hearing and set up and monitor hearing devices (e.g. hearing aids, cochlear implants etc.) They are also likely the first clinicians involved on your journey.	Often employed with Te Whatu Ora / Health New Zealand or at the cochlear implant programmes.
First Signs	First Signs provides an introduction to New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and will support your whānau's journey until your child turns 5 years old. Don't forget to check out their website, it has great tools/videos on communicating with your child.	A member of your team can refer you to First Signs.
Kaiako (Teachers)	Teachers play a large role in meeting your child's needs at your local school and early childhood education centre.	

WHO?	WHAT?	WHERE?
Speech, Language Therapists (SLTs)	These professionals focus on communication and will help your child to navigate communicating in a hearing world. They can help your whānau to teach your child to communicate and or teach your child directly to learn to talk / sign.	Employed by the Ministry of Education, cochlear implant programmes, Ko Taku Reo, or private services.
Ko Taku Reo (Previously Van Asch and Kelston Deaf Education Centres)	Ko Taku Reo provides many services that can support your child/whānau. Depending on where you live this could include: Auckland bilingual preschool (English and NZSL), Christchurch early years whānau centre, support in mainstream schools, Deaf hubs, Resource Teachers of the Deaf (RTDs) etc.	Funded by the Ministry of Education
Local Deaf Society	Many cities in Aotearoa New Zealand have an active Deaf community. These often have many events throughout the year, active social media/Facebook pages, advocacy and support personal etc.	e.g. Auckland Deaf Society; Waikato River Deaf Society etc.
Rōpū tautoko (support groups)	Local groups are often found through searches on the internet / through Facebook. Other members of your team may also be able to connect you to these. Each support group may have a different focus. For example, "the objective of Deaf children NZ Tamariki Turi o Aotearoa is to promote, carry out and coordinate measures conducive to the welfare of Deaf and hard of hearing children and their families..."	e.g. Deaf Children New Zealand, Canterbury Parents of Deaf Children etc.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Talk to the professionals in your team (e.g., AoDCs, audiologists, First Signs Facilitators, etc).

Reach out to Deaf clubs/societies. Many people will be really pleased to hear from you.

- Deaf ecosystem list <https://www.deaf.org.nz/deaf-ecosystem/>

Also check out Deaf Children Aotearoa's Family Book (English and Reo Māori versions available) on d/Deaf children - <https://deafchildren.org.nz/parents/the-family-book/>

Many organisations have additional material on their websites or uploaded onto their YouTube channels. This includes topics such as families' experiences, discussions on language opportunities etc.

Maybe check these out first:

- *First Signs*
 - <https://firstsigns.co.nz/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/@firstsigns/videos>
- *Deaf Children NZ*
 - <https://deafchildren.org.nz/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/@deafchildrennz4442/videos>
- *Deaf Aotearoa*
 - <https://www.deaf.org.nz/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/@Deafaotearoa/videos>
- NZSL week resources
 - <https://nzslweek.org.nz/>

Your local library or librarians can also help you find resources. Many resources that are 'out-of-print' are still available there.

Get started with NZSL

Online NZSL resources:

- *First Signs* – many educational videos on how to sign/communicate with your infant in everyday tasks.
<https://firstsigns.co.nz/learn-sign/>
- *TuriTV* – lots of different resources in NZSL for all ages and stages of NZSL knowledge.
<https://www.turitv.co.nz/>
- *Learn NZSL* – free learning portal online.
<http://www.learnnzsl.nz/#/id/co-01>
- *The Kids on Kōrero Lane* - Tv programme in NZSL on TVNZonDemand. <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/kids-of-korero-lane-the>
- *NZSL dictionary* - English to NZSL translation of signs. Can also sort via topic/subject. <https://www.nzsl.nz/>
- *NZSL Share* - NZSL dictionary made by signing individuals. Signs that are not in the NZSL dictionary may be found here.
<https://www.nzslshare.nz/>

NZSL courses:

Night and online sign courses will depend on location. Most classes will follow the same curriculum with homework and additional exercises found here:

- <https://www.teachsign.org.nz/learners>

You may be eligible for funding towards NZSL classes:

Deaf Children Aotearoa: NZ sign language classes subsidy fund.

<https://deafchildren.org.nz/get-funding/deaf-children-nz-funding/>

****Note**, it is important to prioritise resources created by Deaf people. There are many reasons, one is that you are more likely to have accurate information.

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