

Beyond the Audiogram: Empowering Deaf Children & Families Through Bilingual Early Intervention

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Why This Matters For Newborn Screening

- Dominance of the medical model in newborn hearing screening and early intervention.
- Early identification is key for language development.
- Early detection of deafness is essential, but language access is just as critical.
- 95% of deaf children are born to hearing families, yet many receive medical guidance without exposure to bilingual language options.

Rights Of Deaf Children

Aligning with Family-Centred Early Intervention (FCEI) principles which encompass:

- United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- The World Federation of the Deaf Declaration on the Rights of Deaf Children
- The Deaf Leadership International Alliance (scan QR code to visit)



How Deafness Is Framed In Early Intervention



Children exposed to Auslan early develop on par with hearing peers in cognitive and social-emotional development.

Science Of Bilingual Early Intervention (Auslan & Speech)

Why Bilingual Language Access is Essential for Children with Hearing Impairment:

- Early exposure to sign language does not hinder speech development; it enhances literacy and language skills.
- Research shows children with hearing impairment who learn both Auslan and spoken English have stronger executive function and cognitive flexibility.
- Neurological studies confirms that early visual language input ensures healthy brain development, preventing language deprivation syndrome. Delayed sign language exposure correlates with a higher risk of language deprivation.

Benefits Of Bilingualism

“It takes a village”



Access to language from birth is a fundamental human right, not an optional intervention

Fig 1: Timeline showing critical brain development and language milestones (0-5 years)

Role Of Deaf Adult Family Mentors

Why Deaf mentorship works:

- Hearing parents often feel overwhelmed and uninformed.
- Deaf mentorship reframe deafness as a natural human variation rather than a deficit.
- Parents in Deaf Mentor Programs report reduced anxiety and increased confidence.
- Deaf Connect statistics suggest 75% of parents in Deaf mentoring programs felt more positive about their child's future, and 80% felt less anxious about their child living with deafness after meeting a Deaf mentor.

Role Of Audiologists And Medical Professionals

How you can support families beyond screening:

- Audiologists and medical professionals play a vital role in shaping parents perceptions of their child's future.
- Instead of just diagnosing hearing impairment, audiologists can support bilingual access and informed choice.

How You Can Reframe Deafness For Families



- ⊗ “Your child has hearing loss”
- ⊗ “We need to act fast on cochlear implants”
- ⊗ “Sign language might delay speech”

- ✓ “Your child has access to two languages – let’s discuss communication options.”
- ✓ “Let’s ensure your child has early language access in any form”
- ✓ “Research shows bilingual exposure supports speech and literacy”

Review Deaf Connect’s early intervention research here.
deafconnect.org.au

