

Supporting Adolescents who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Transition to Post-School Education and Employment - A Fact Sheet for Careers Personnel

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Key facts

- ❖ School-leavers who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) face additional challenges in their transition to post-school education and employment. They need transition planning and career guidance that includes deafness-related issues.
- ❖ Social and emotional wellbeing and identity issues can become problematic for D/HH adolescents and can have a detrimental effect on their transition
- ❖ Students need well-developed self-advocacy skills. Once they leave school, they will need to advocate on their own behalf for accommodations and supports in postsecondary education and the workplace.
- ❖ Collaboration between schools' careers personnel and students' teachers of the deaf is essential to ensure that D/HH students receive appropriate transition preparation and planning.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are a diverse population. They may have any degree of permanent hearing loss, from mild to profound. Some students will use spoken language only to communicate, others will use sign language (Auslan) as well, or predominantly. Although children have access to advanced technology such as digital hearing aids and cochlear implants, these do not restore normal hearing. Children and young people continue to need specialised educational supports, including specialised post-school transition preparation and planning.

Most people with hearing loss will encounter daily challenges and barriers, both environmental and attitudinal. These contribute to D/HH people having, on average, lower postsecondary education and employment outcomes than the general population. In addition, changes in the labour market and the world of work in recent years, such as greater mobility in the workforce and more casual, freelance, and contract work, can pose additional communication challenges to people who are D/HH. School-leavers who are D/HH need extensive knowledge and skills to overcome the challenges and barriers they are likely to face in training, at college or university, and in their everyday working lives. Self-advocacy skills are particularly important.

Self-advocacy

In primary and secondary school, students who are D/HH are provided with appropriate educational accommodations and supports on the initiative of parents and educators. After leaving school, young people must take on the responsibility and initiative of doing this for themselves. In order to obtain needed accommodations, young people who are

D/HH need to be able to advocate on their own behalf. The ability to be an effective self-advocate requires well-developed communication, negotiation and social skills. For young people who are D/HH, the specific self-advocacy skills and knowledge that help in their transition to post-school life include:

- ❖ Understanding their own hearing loss and strategies to address their communication challenges
- ❖ Awareness of appropriate accommodations in workplace and postsecondary education settings
- ❖ Knowing how and when to disclose their hearing loss
- ❖ Ability to communicate and explain their hearing challenges, accommodations, and solutions

Knowing how and when to disclose their hearing loss (e.g., in a job application, at job interview) can be difficult. Young people need to be able to explain the implications of their hearing loss in a particular environment and show that they can come up with solutions and ways around any limitations it causes. They need to have the communication skills to discuss and negotiate options for accommodations or supports.

Ways in which school careers personnel can help students to develop these self-advocacy skills include modeling, role plays, and developing a script that students can rehearse to explain their hearing loss at job interviews.

Identity issues in adolescence

When D/HH children reach adolescence, their social and emotional wellbeing can become more problematic as they struggle with issues around their identity as a D/HH person, self-consciousness about their deafness and their hearing aids or cochlear implants, and fitting in with hearing peers (Kent, 2003; Kent & Smith, 2006; Punch & Hyde, 2011). These difficulties can have a negative impact on their social self-concept and their self-efficacy in the area of career planning and decision-making (Punch & Hyde, 2005). They may be reluctant to wear hearing aids or use assistive devices. They are often also reluctant to talk about these matters, and yet a collaborative conversation with an adult who is prepared to listen and understand can have an important positive impact. One way that professionals such as careers counselors and teachers of the deaf can establish a good dialogue about these things is to use a questionnaire as a basis for a conversation. The “Self-Assessment of Communication – Adolescent” checklist taps into D/HH teenagers’ perceptions and feelings about their hearing loss and can be the starting point of a helpful conversation between professionals and students (English, 2012).

Employment

Sometimes students are unsure if their hearing loss will preclude them from pursuing a particular occupation and they may prematurely rule out areas they are interested in. Careers personnel can help students to explore these options. Many jobs that people who are D/HH would have been unable to do in the past are today possible with the use of technological and other accommodations. It can be helpful for students to explore websites such as Aussie Deaf Kids (www.aussiedeafkids.org.au), Deaf Children Australia (<http://deafchildrenaustralia.org.au>), Deaf ConnectEd (www.deafconnected.com.au), Job Access (www.jobaccess.gov.au), and Hear For You

(<http://hearforyou.com.au>), which all have examples and stories of people who are D/HH in a variety of jobs and careers.

Under Australian legislation employers are required to make reasonable adjustments or accommodations to enable a person with a disability to perform the “inherent requirements” of a job. Many adjustments are simple and cost little or nothing, such as improving lighting or re-arranging furniture so that a person with hearing loss can see others better in the workplace (Punch, Hyde, & Power, 2007). Others may involve more cost. The Employment Assistance Fund, a federal government initiative, provides funds to people with disability or their employer for adjustments such as adaptive equipment for the workplace, information and communication devices, Auslan interpreting, live captioning, and deafness awareness training to co-workers.

Postsecondary education

Supports available to students who are D/HH at universities and colleges of further education can include:

- ❖ Auslan interpreting
- ❖ Live captioning services
- ❖ Note-taking services
- ❖ Alternative exam arrangements
- ❖ Specialised tutoring
- ❖ Reasonable adjustments for professional placements, internships and other workplace arrangements
- ❖ Transcription of audio visual material if not already captioned
- ❖ Audio loops

However, even when provided with accommodations, students who are D/HH have reduced access to full academic and social participation at university or TAFE. As well, many students with hearing loss do not access the disability services in postsecondary education. Students may choose not to do this because they do not identify themselves as a person with a disability, they do not identify as deaf, and/or they think they do not need any supports. Some students are unaware of accommodations that could help them in new learning environments that are very different from school (Brett, 2010; Hyde et al., 2009). Young people will be best prepared to succeed in university or TAFE if they make an appointment with the institution’s disability support office before beginning their course, if they have good communication and social skills, and if they make the most of accommodations available as well as services available to all students (Cawthon et al., 2015; Cawthon & the PN2 RES team, 2012).

Transition needs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing

Research studies in the USA and Australia found that D/HH students in mainstream schools received little transition planning or career guidance that addressed their hearing-related issues (Luft, 2013, 2014; Luft & Huff, 2011; Punch, Creed, & Hyde, 2006). An Australian study found that many students in Years 10 to 12 were unaware of accommodations, strategies, or systems that could help them in workplace settings.

Students were worried about working in groups, requirements to speak on the telephone, and people not understanding the implications of their hearing loss. The students who were D/HH had less paid work experience than their peers without hearing loss, partly because they avoided jobs that involved serving the public (Punch, et al., 2006). Work experience is particularly important for students who are D/HH, and is most valuable when it is followed by discussion with a knowledgeable adult about challenges the student encountered and ways to minimise these in the future.

In summary, transition and career preparation programs for students in general are unlikely to be adequate for students who have a hearing loss. The following transition practices are recommended for secondary students who are D/HH:

- ❖ Career guidance from professionals knowledgeable about deafness-related issues
- ❖ Collaboration between teachers of the deaf and mainstream teachers and career counsellors on transition planning
- ❖ Preparation to identify and address potential difficulties in postsecondary education and employment
- ❖ Development of students' awareness of accommodations available and the legal requirements of postsecondary education and employers to provide them
- ❖ Help in accessing the increasing range of technical assistive devices and systems available
- ❖ Self-determination instruction, including self-advocacy, negotiation, and assertiveness skills
- ❖ Discussion of how and when to disclose hearing loss, explain its effects and inform employers of ways around any difficulties
- ❖ Work experience with follow-up discussion to maximize learning
- ❖ Family involvement and empowerment
- ❖ D/HH adult role models and mentoring programs such as Hear For You
- ❖ Strong links with agencies offering employment services and other post-school services

Most importantly, careers personnel, teachers of the deaf, and families need to work together to support students who are D/HH in their transition to post-school education and employment.

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