

# Working with adults, children and young people with additional needs: An Introduction to sensory/multi-sensory impairments

We hope that you will find this 'introduction' leaflet helpful. It is not intended to replace conversations that you will need to have with children, young people, their families, and the professionals who know them. Those conversations are essential to understand the uniqueness of each family member you work with to ensure that you can engage with them in the most meaningful and supportive way. Links to relevant charities, information services and research are embedded at the end of this leaflet.

Sensory impairment is the common term used to describe Deafness, blindness, visual impairment, hearing impairment and Deafblindness.

When the term Deaf is used (note the capital D), this indicates that the person identifies as culturally Deaf and that they communicate using sign language (typically British Sign Language for people in the UK). Deaf people tend to share a strong sense of community which has its own rich linguistic heritage and culture. For most Deaf people, English will be a second language, hearing practitioners must be mindful of this in both written and verbal communication, using interpreters where necessary.



The term deaf (lower case d) tends to refer to people with a range of hearing impairments including acquired deafness. People with deafness or hearing loss may or may not use BSL and will often have English as a first language. They are less likely to identify with Deaf culture.

People who consider themselves deaf often rely on hearing aids to enhance the hearing they have but will not replace hearing to its original level. Induction Loop Systems are provided in many Cafcass/Court buildings for the benefit of hearing aid wearers. The system picks up the conversation, amplifies it and transfers it directly to the users hearing aid whilst reducing any unwanted background noise. This allows the user to hear more clearly and communicate better.

Levels of sight loss which used to be referred to as 'blind and partially sighted', now tend to be referred to as sight impaired and severely sight impaired.

When a person has difficulty seeing or hearing they can be referred to as having a dual sensory loss or deafblind. Usually, a person will have difficulty with communication, mobilising and accessing information.

The child, young person or adult you're working with may have a preference about how you record and refer to their sensory impairment, for example "Jane is a young person with a hearing impairment" or "Jane is a Deaf young person." It is important to ask what their individual preference is and to be clear about why this information, especially if more detailed personal information is also being shared, is relevant to the court.

## JUST ASK Video



## Planning for meetings, interviews and direct work

A child, young person or adult with a sensory impairment(s) may need you to adjust how you would usually undertake direct work, interviews or observations of time spent with their family. It is important that you establish what they need from you to make this an effective piece of work. Speaking with the child, young person or adult and their family members and the professionals who know them will guide your planning.

### These are some general tips to think about:

- ✓ **Where/how would the person like to meet?** Remote working can be effective and may be more appropriate for some children and young people. It is important to ask. Can you plan to meet where there are loop systems if the person is a hearing aid user?
- ✓ Make sure you **understand the child, young person or adult's individual needs**. You may need to make adjustments to the physical environment you are meeting with them in, for example removing furniture, ensuring that parking outside of the building is reserved, or is specific lighting required? For those who lip read, ensure that you speak clearly and your mouth isn't obstructed. People with sensory impairments have varied support needs, don't assume how they should be supported. Always ask what they need in the interview/meeting process.
- ✓ **Be prepared** – If a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter is required, a booking via BigWord will be required in advance of the meeting date, for parents and children. If interpreters are required in Court, remember each party will require their own interpreter and if it's going to be an all-day hearing for example, interpreters often work in pairs as long bouts of dialogue can be tiring for both the BSL user and the interpreter. Does the person have a preferred interpreter or would like a say in which one is being used? Where possible parents should not be used to interpret for their children or vice versa
- ✓ When **deciding whether in person or remote working is more appropriate** you need to be sure whichever you choose will allow you the opportunity to understand their needs and enable them to engage meaningfully. It is important to ask if they have a preference.
- ✓ **Let them take the lead to set the pace** - listen.
- ✓ **Give enough time** for the direct work, interview or observation of contact.
- ✓ **Don't be afraid to be creative.**



Top 5 tips for communicating with deaf young people video

The templates for the introductory letters are editable. These letters can be sent to a child to introduce yourself and share details about the purpose of your interview/visit. Use of pictures and images is appropriate in these letters, particularly when working with very young children. All information should be provided in accessible formats.

- For those with a visual impairment whereby a letter would not be appropriate, think about how you can introduce yourself in advance of the interview. Would a call or voice note be useful?
- Sharing your photograph/a picture or a description of yourself and the room you're going to be meeting in so the child, young person or adult is familiar with your face and the setting is appropriate, which may help manage any anxieties.
- After the direct work/interview has finished it is important to know how your recommendations to the court and the outcome of any hearing will be shared with the child. Would they like you to write to them again or use other ways of communicating? Is this best communicated via solicitors, family members or professionals, and if so, why? 'Easy read' letters and judgements are becoming more widespread within the family court and you can advocate for these from the judges and magistrates. These outcome letters can form a valuable part of a child's life story work. Even if the child cannot understand the letter at their current age or developmental stage it is something they may be able to understand as they get older. If the child is visually impaired, could you send a voice recording via phone/email of what you would have said in an outcome letter?

### Safeguarding:

Children, young people and adults with additional needs are at greater risk of abuse due to communication barriers, the signs of abuse being misunderstood or minimised, increased isolation and greater dependence on others for their care, a lack of education to help them to stay safe, and inadequate support. It is important to work proactively to protect vulnerable children and adults, be professionally curious and respectfully challenge others if we have concerns.

### How can you be sure you're making the right adjustments?

The short answer is you can't. However, if you're flexible and willing to try different approaches, you're far more likely to succeed.

#### Using Cafcass Direct Work Practice Aides



Cafcass direct work practice aides are designed to be used with all children, young people and adults. Here are some tips and ideas to help you use them:

- Limit the number of 'pages' or screens you are using from the practice aides. This allows for clear questioning with visual support. Don't try to complete the entire practice aide unless this is something the child or young person wants to do and can manage.
- Share the sections of the practice aide you intend to use in advance of the session. This could include sharing them with educators or support staff. They may be able to offer guidance to you about how best to engage with the child, young person or adult.

- Include pictures or images in letters to the judge. These may convey the message the child or young person wants to communicate effectively and will allow the court to hear their voice.
- The 'Dictate' software can be used to allow the child to interact directly and see their own words on the page.
- Are there other practice aides that the child/parent utilises to make their wishes known on a day to day basis? Can you be supported in utilising them to assist you?
- Don't feel you need to do all the direct work yourself. Adults that the child or young person are familiar with may be key to helping you understand how best to communicate. Working alongside educators, carers and support staff may provide opportunities to amplify a child's voice in a way that you could not do alone.
- [Cafcass resources for professionals](#)

Remember, connection before content.

The importance of planning and relationship building cannot be underestimated.

## Links

[What is Deafblindness? - Deafblind UK](#)

Search Results | Council For Disabled Children

[Course: Communicating with deaf parents and children \(learningnexus.co.uk\)](#)