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Hearing impairment, also referred to as deafness, hearing loss, hard of hearing or anacusis, is the partial or total loss of the ability to hear. It happens as the result of sound signals not reaching the brain. There are two main types of hearing impairment:

- **Sensorineural:** This occurs naturally with age or through illness or injury to the inner ear or auditory nerve. This may be a permanent condition but can be helped with hearing aids.
- **Conductive:** This occurs as a result of blockages in the outer ear through earwax or fluid from an ear infection. This may be a temporary condition that can be corrected with medication or minor surgery.

Illnesses connected with impairments of the ears include: tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in the ear), Ménière's disease (loss of balance) and labyrinthitis (dizziness and a sensation of spinning).

The severity of hearing loss is measured in decibels of hearing loss (dB HL) and is ranked as:

- Mild: Between 20 and 40 dB HL.
- Moderate: Between 41 and 54 dB HL.
- Moderately severe: Between 55 and 70 dB HL.
- Severe: Between 71 and 90 dB HL.
- Profound: Over 91 dB HL.
- Total deafness: No hearing at all.

The degree of hearing impairment can vary considerably from person to person. Some people may have partial loss of hearing whereas others may be totally deaf. Some may be born with a hearing impairment (congenital deafness); others may acquire it over a period of time (post-lingual deafness). Some people have normal hearing in a quiet environment but struggle when there is background noise; this is known as an auditory processing disorder (APD).

The challenges for children and young people with hearing impairments may include:

- Only catching parts of conversations and avoiding taking part in conversation and social interaction.
- Needing to have the television or music turned on to full volume.
- Not hearing the door being knocked or the telephone ringing.
- Responding inappropriately to questions or taking a long time to respond.

- Difficulty in localising sound sources.
- Frequently complaining of ear aches.

There are more than 10 million people in the UK with some form of hearing impairment; with an estimated 45,000 children and young people who are categorised as deaf. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate that this figure will grow by about 50% over the next 20 years.

Children and young people who lose their hearing post-lingual (after speech has developed) may have great difficulty adjusting because the ability to hear has been an essential part of their communication and relationships. Life isn't much easier for people born with deafness but with support, and the use of new technologies such as cochlear implants, children and young people with both congenital and post-lingual deafness can lead productive lives. People who achieved great fame despite having severe hearing impairments include Thomas Edison and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Strategies for Supporting Children and Young People with Hearing Impairments

Here are two entertainers who achieved fame despite their deafness:

Johnnie Ray was a singer/songwriter who first achieved fame in the 1950s. He is credited by a number of musicians as being the true father of rock and roll. He had nine top-ten hits in the UK (including three number ones). He became deaf in one ear as a result of an accident at the age of 13 and deaf in both ears at the age of 31. He was still able to perform his unique brand of blues/rock and roll using hearing aids.

I first saw Marlee Beth Matlin play the role of Joey Lucas, a political adviser, in the *West Wing*. It inspired me to take a British Sign Language (BSL) course. I hadn't realised at the time that, in 1986, she had won a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for her performance in the film *Children of a Lesser God*. She has been totally deaf since she was 18 months old, following a bout of measles, and is the only deaf actor to win an Oscar.

Strategies for supporting a child or young person with a hearing impairment include:

- Find out what their preferred way of communicating is (e.g. signing or lip-reading).
- Make sure that you get their attention when communicating with them.
- Make sure they can see your face and mouth when you communicate with them. Don't try to communicate in poor lighting or with your hand over your mouth. People who are profoundly deaf and rely on lip-reading also hate drooping moustaches.



- Speak clearly and naturally. Don't assume the role of the 'idiot abroad' and feel you have to talk slowly and loudly to them.
- Give out visual clues on what you are talking about. Don't feel embarrassed by miming certain things to help them understand the message you are trying to convey.
- Try to avoid talking when there is considerable background noise.
- Ensure that directions, safety signs and instructions are displayed correctly before letting people living with deafness take part in games or activities.
- Make learning sign language an integral part of classroom activities for the whole class. This can be great fun and rewarding for all.

Don't ever give up. Even if your first attempts to communicate are failing, showing frustration or walking away will upset or annoy them and do very little for their self-esteem. The other side of the coin is if they are being deliberately awkward then don't allow them to use their deafness as an excuse.

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Hear disease, also referred to as cardiovascular disease or heart defect, is a general term that describes a disease of the heart or blood vessels. Heart disease is present in around one in every 100 births in the UK, making it the most common birth abnormality. It also accounts for around a third of all childhood deaths. Some kinds of heart diseases are mild and may not be diagnosed in infancy. Others are severe and will be easily diagnosable soon after birth. In 2011, there were almost 160,000 deaths as a result of heart disease in the UK; making it the UK's biggest killer.

There are a number of different forms of heart disease that normally fall into one of two categories:

- **Congenital Heart Disease (CHD):** This is the type of heart disease that a baby is born with. It is more of a defect than a disease and is an abnormality of the heart or the blood vessels near the heart. The majority of children born with CHD will survive and through proper treatment are able to lead normal or near-normal lives.
- **Acquired Heart Disease (AHD):** This type of heart disease is not present at birth and will be caused by conditioning, infections or fever. The most common causes of AHD include: obesity, rheumatic heart fever, Kawasaki disease and Chagas disease.

The symptoms that are often present with heart disease include:

- Blue colouring in skin and lips.
- Shortness of breath.

