

**Q. What is a hearing impairment/deaf?**

**A.** When a person's hearing is affected to an extent that renders the understanding of speech through the ear alone (with or without a hearing aid) difficult or impossible, they are said to have a hearing impairment. The implications of hearing loss vary from person to person and are related to the individual's circumstances, thus making it difficult to define hearing impairment/deafness.

**Q. What are some characteristics of hearing impairment/deaf?**

**A.** Determining whether an individual is hearing impaired involves assessing the minimum audible intensity that the individual can hear. Hearing impairment is categorised as follows:

Minimum audible intensity Level of Impairment

-10 – 20 Decibels Normal Hearing

20 – 30 Decibels Mildly Hard of Hearing

30 – 60 Decibels Moderately Hard of Hearing

60 – 89 Decibels Severely Hard of Hearing

90 Decibels or over Profoundly Deaf

Given the considerable difference between these five levels, it is not possible to present 'general' characteristics associated with hearing impairment. Similarly, the effect of a hearing impairment on a particular individual's development depends on the severity, type of loss, age at which the condition appears and overall functioning level of the individual. However, it is known that the difficulties experienced may actually hinder or delay development in:

Acquiring language

Developing a communication system

Moving from the concrete to the abstract

## Expressing ideas

### **Q. What can be done to help someone with a hearing impairment/deaf?**

The provision of good support and counselling for both parents and children is of paramount importance once deafness is diagnosed. Acceptance of the hearing loss is needed by all the parties involved. The deaf child should be fitted with good hearing aids or, if suitable, with a cochlear implant. The provision of a language-rich environment is necessary to stimulate language acquisition in the deaf child. Efforts should be made to increase public awareness regarding deafness to facilitate the deaf person's interaction in a hearing world.

In addition, contact should be made with the visiting teacher service. Visiting teachers provide a service for students in mainstream schools with specific conditions such as hearing and visual impairments. The emphasis of their work is on direct teaching and providing an advisory and support service for both teachers and parents.

#### **Related Links**

[Irish Deaf Society](#)

[National Association for Deaf People](#)

[Royal National Institute for Deaf People \(UK\)](#)

[DEAFDIGEST](#) (US)