



## HELPING CHILDREN WHO DO NOT SEE OR HEAR WELL

### THE IDEA

Some children cannot see or hear as well as others. If this is discovered early, we can do a lot to overcome the impairment. Therefore it is very important to find out if children can see and hear well while they are still young. There are different ways of doing this. Other children can help to find out whether a child sees and hears properly, and learn to do a lot to help those with sight or hearing impairments.

Children who do not hear or see well will not learn as quickly as other children. Sometimes, we do not realise what is wrong with such children. We do not know that they are having difficulties because they do not tell others. They usually do not even know themselves what the problem is.

Babies who do not hear will not learn to talk or understand as early as others, so their development may be slower than that of other children. However, if we can communicate with the child in other ways, they will be able to develop more normally. Children with hearing impairments may appear shy and quiet and prefer to be alone.

Sometimes children who do not hear well seem to be naughty because they do not understand what to do. They do not always respond to sounds or voices. They may fail to answer questions, or to come when their name is called.

Children who cannot see well may seem to ignore their friends. They may stumble or fall (see Activity Sheet 3.2 **Looking After Our Eyes**). They may not notice holes in the ground and so trip over.



**It is very important that children who see and hear well play and learn with those who do not!**

### Understanding what it feels like to have impaired hearing and sight

One way of getting children to think about problems of seeing and hearing is to ask questions like:

#### Where and how these activities have been used

Children with seeing and hearing difficulties are far more common than we think. Once we know that they exist we can often help the children to lead a normal life. But we must identify these children first.

Many people have criticised the activities in this sheet (although all of them have been developed with children in the field, e.g. in **Mexico** and **Mozambique**). They say children are not doctors or health workers and cannot measure properly. This is not the point. If children (or their teachers) can identify some of their friends who may need help, then the health worker can test them more thoroughly and help those who really do have difficulties. If no one cares and no one tries to find out, then no one is helped. It is a basic principle of Child-to-Child and primary health care that children should be able to recognise when help from a health worker is needed.

- Do you know anyone who does not see or hear well? How do they behave? Are their other senses more developed?
- Do you act differently with these people? What do you do?
- How do you think you would feel if you did not see well? Or hear well?
- How many people in your community do not see well? Or hear well?

## HELPING CHILDREN WHO CANNOT HEAR WELL

### Understanding hearing impairment

#### *A game for observing if children hear well*

Older children can help to find out how well children can hear by playing a game with the younger ones. Let young children about to enter school stand in a semicircle. An older child stands by each younger one. Each older child has a pencil and paper. Another older child stands at the centre of the semicircle. They should be several metres from the younger ones. They then call out the name of an animal very loudly. Each younger child whispers the name to their helper who writes it down. This is repeated with the names of ten or more animals. Each time the older child says a name, their voice gets quieter, until they are whispering. When the list is finished, the helpers compare their lists to see what the younger children have heard.

If any child hears fewer names than the others, they may have a hearing problem. Let them sit in the front of the class where they can hear and see the teacher's face and the board easily. However, it is important to note that this is not a proper test. Even, if a child does seem to get all the list right, they may still have a hearing problem. The older child may be helping them more than they realise.

### Recognise the signs

Here are some signs which can tell us if a young child is having difficulty hearing:

- They make normal noises as a baby, but do not learn to speak as they get older.
- They do not notice voices or noises if they do not see where they are coming from.
- They seem to be disobedient, or are the last person to obey an order or a request.
- Their ears are infected, or liquid or pus is coming out.
- They watch people's lips when they are talking.
- They turn their head in one direction in order to hear.
- They speak rather loudly and not very clearly.
- Sometimes they may appear to be quiet and perhaps rude and prefer to be alone.
- They may not do as well at school as they should.

A child who behaves in this way may need help. Young children can be severely deaf without it being recognised, and older children can have a slight hearing impairment without it being recognised. What can we do to help them? We need to find ways to meet their needs.

Like any other child, children with hearing impairments learn by watching others and copying what they do. When they are included in family activities, they learn as quickly as other children. If children with hearing impairments are left alone, they will not learn.

Children who are born with hearing impairments have great difficulty in learning to speak. They cannot hear speech sounds, and so they are not able to copy the sounds. However, some children learn to understand people's speech by watching their lips (lipreading). All can learn to communicate with hand and body signs, and can develop a proper language if exposed to sign language early enough. **Many children with hearing impairments can learn to speak very well if given the right help.**

**Many children with hearing impairments can hear some sounds. These children can learn to speak more easily if they are helped.**

There are a number of ways that older children can be of help to other children who cannot hear properly:

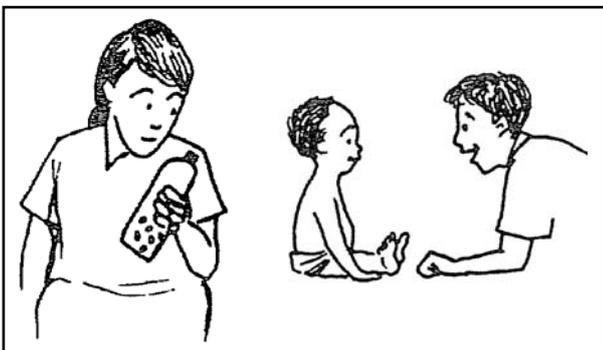
## ACTIVITY SHEET 5.2

### CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

- If they notice signs of hearing impairment or infection in the ears of the younger children in the family, they can tell parents, teachers or health workers.
- They can find out how well younger children can hear.
- They can communicate with children who do not hear well by learning some sign language or by speaking slowly and directly to children who cannot hear well so that they can lipread.
- They can think of ways to include children who do not hear well in their games and activities.
- They can understand that children who do not hear well can often do as much and sometimes more than children who hear well, but that there are some things which children who do not hear well will find very difficult.

### Noticing hearing impairment

Use this test for young children who do not speak. Sit the child on the ground. Have another child sit in front of them and catch their attention, then stand about one metre behind them so that they cannot see you. Use a rattle (like seeds in a tin) and gently shake it, first to one side of their head and then the other. The child sitting in front can then check the reaction. If the baby's eyes or head do not move to follow the sound, they may have difficulty hearing.



It is also possible to test in the same way by:

- tapping or stirring a spoon or bowl.
- making a snake hissing sound.
- calling the baby's name softly.

These different sounds have different pitches and the child may only reply to some of them. This means they can only hear certain sounds. Can the baby hear the sound at all? How close do we have to be before the baby can hear the sound? Can the baby hear it when it is a gentle noise, or does the sound have to be very loud before they can hear it?

There is another test we can use for children who can understand some words. Gather together a number of things around the house – like a bowl, cup, spoon, some fruit, a toy. Check to make sure the child knows the names of these things. Then sit about one metre away from the child, with your back to them so that they cannot see your lips moving as you talk. Ask them in a normal voice to give you the objects, one after another. Can they hear you ask for the cup, the bowl, the spoon? This is one way of finding out if children are hearing, or if they are lipreading in order to understand what is being said to them.

**Remember:** *Never* rely on just one test. Try again on another day in order to make sure. Maybe the child was tired. If a child is not hearing well, they should be taken to a health worker for a thorough check-up.

### How well do babies hear?

Children can help to find out how well the babies in the family can hear:

- They can play games with their baby brothers and sisters. For example, they can make a rattle from seeds or small stones. They can creep up quietly behind the baby and shake the rattle gently or make a quiet sound (but one that they can hear easily). They should not stand right behind the baby but at an angle of about 45°. Does the baby turn their head and look towards the sound?
- They can call out the baby's name from different places in the room. If the baby does not seem surprised, or does not turn their head towards the noise, they are probably not hearing well. They may need to be taken to the health worker to have their hearing properly checked.

### **Talk to the mother**

Does the mother feel that her baby does not always hear what is happening or when she calls their name?

### **Looking after baby's ears**

Older children can regularly check the ears of smaller brothers and sisters to see that there is no pus or dirt or small objects in them. If they see anything wrong, they should tell an older person who should take the child to a health worker for help.

## **Children can help**

Older children can be very helpful to younger ones who are having difficulty hearing. They can help them to hear; they can help them to speak, and to communicate in other ways with family and friends.

Very few people are completely deaf. There is almost always some hearing left, and it should be used. It is often difficult to know how much a deaf child, especially a baby, is able to hear. So it is important to give them plenty of practice in listening to different sounds, and to people speaking to them.

### **Hearing games for children to play**

Children may think of games to play with babies such as:

- singing songs to babies and teaching them to young children.
- telling stories and changing the voice to sound like different people in the story; some may be soft, others loud, others angry.

Older children can help a young baby start to listen for sounds. Sit the baby on your knees and sing into the ear, play music, speak loudly and clearly. Do this several times each day. Don't give up if at first the baby does not seem to notice the sound. Keep on trying. Repeat the sounds which the child reacts to.

Older children can play games with the young child, to encourage them to try and speak. Take some familiar objects – only two to begin with. Hold one up and say its

name. Put it in the child's hand and then say the name twice gently in their ear. Encourage the hearing-impaired child to say the word if they are able. Praise any attempt they make to speak, even if it is not clear. Let them try again. Do not force them to speak. If they can, they will do it in their own time.



### **Communicating with others**

Sometimes the hearing-impaired child is angry and seems naughty (they may cry and scream) because they do not understand others, or they do not understand the child. Always be patient. This is particularly important for children with almost no hearing.

Brothers and sisters often understand the child who cannot hear well better than the parents, and can help them communicate with those around the child, by talking, signing and lipreading.

### **Talking**

Older children can help others to remember the rules for talking with children who have difficulty hearing:

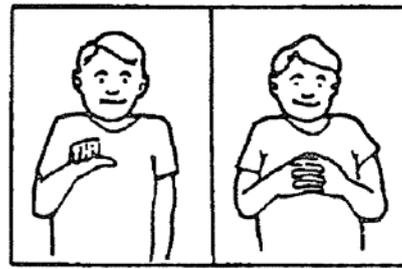
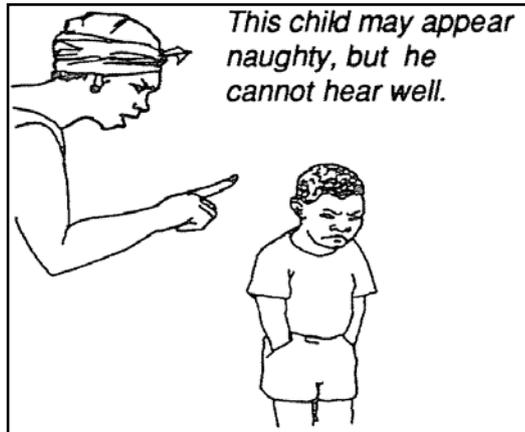
- Put the child at the front of the class.
- Talk to the child who cannot hear well as much as possible.
- Use a good, clear voice.
- When talking to a child who cannot hear well, stand or sit so that they can see your face and lips so that they can lipread.
- Always show pleasure when a child who cannot hear well uses their voice, and praise any attempt at speech, even if it is not correct.
- Use signs when necessary, but do not

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### CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

stop talking to the child at the same time.

- Use short, simple sentences.
- Change the word, if they do not understand.



ME

HELP



FOOD

YES

NO

### Make up a sign language

### Lipreading

Some people with hearing impairments lipread very well. Others find it very difficult. Some words are easier to lipread than others. All children who do not hear well should be given the chance to lipread.

Make sure that they can see your face and lips when you are speaking to them. This allows them to see the expression on your face and the shape the lips are forming.

Here are some games older children can play with others who have difficulty hearing. Do not spend more than ten minutes with a game, as the child will get tired.

- Point to yourself and say your name. Point to the child and say their name. Do this many times during the day. Ask another helper to say the names with you, while pointing to the right person. Let the child join in.
- Give the child different objects to give to other people, saying, 'Give the cup to Robert!' Similarly you can ask the child who does not hear well to throw a ball to different children whose names are called out by an older child.

### Using signs

Encourage other children in the family to make up signs to represent the words they need. Everyone in the family can learn them. When using signs, always speak at the same time so that the child can learn to lipread the words.

Perhaps there are other children who do not hear well in the area who are using one common sign language. If so, find out what it is, learn it and teach it to the child who does not hear well.

### Setting up a sign language club

A sign language club based in a school in Musakanya, Zambia, involves both teachers and pupils. After one year in operation, three-quarters of the teachers had acquired some ability to communicate with children with hearing impairments.

The club operates once a week. The head teaches a particular set of signs to selected teachers one week, and they teach these signs to a group of pupils the following week. However, as hearing children work more closely with the children with hearing impairments, the children's skills in signing rapidly increase, outstripping the adults.

### Sharing responsibilities

At the same school, children with hearing impairments share responsibilities with other children, for example, being class monitors, closing and locking the doors and windows of the schools, raising and lowering the school flag, helping to take care of the school pit latrines. Enabling the children with hearing impairments to take part in these tasks helps them feel they are full members of the school, and encourages an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual understanding.

## Make toys and play games

Older children can make toys for children who do not hear well and teach them the names of the toys. They can make a book of pictures so that the child who does not hear well can begin to learn names and say them. Pictures can be of their toys and of everyday things around the home. They may be cut out from papers, or older children can draw them.

It is very important that older children think of games that children who do not hear well can play with them. Never leave a child who does not hear well out of play activities. Take turns in talking and singing songs to a deaf child. **Remember, they can only learn by watching and copying what other people do. If they are left alone, they cannot learn.** You must go on and on helping them until they learn.

## Find out and discuss

Ask the children to find out if anyone is having hearing problems at home, in the community, in the school. How old are they? How did their hearing become impaired? How do they communicate with others? What things can they do well?

The children can discuss ways of protecting their ears and their hearing. They can learn to watch for the warning signs, like ears that are sore and infected.

They can learn to prevent young children pushing sticks and other dangerous things like seeds and stones into their ears. Like our eyes and our teeth, our ears are very precious.

## HELPING CHILDREN WHO CANNOT SEE WELL

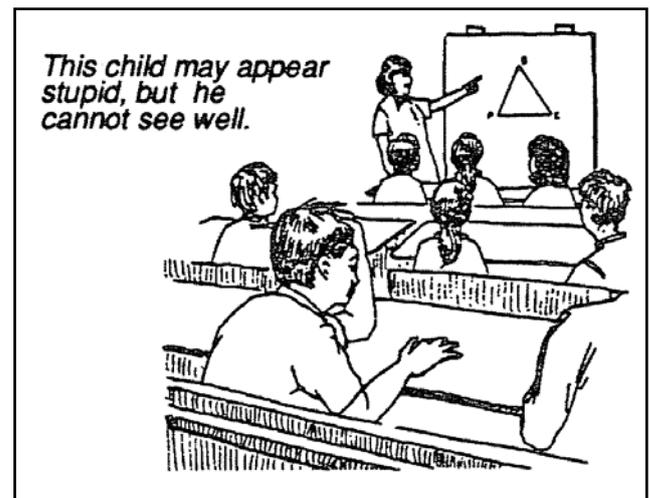
A child who does not see well can understand what is happening around them if others take the time to explain to them.

### Recognising the signs

The child:

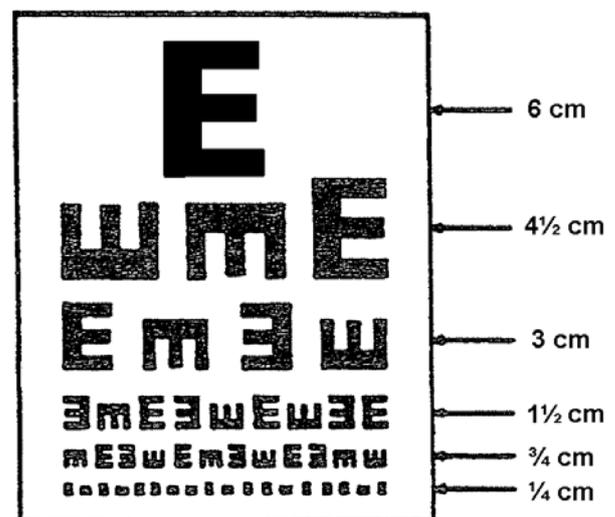
- bumps into things and falls easily.

- has difficulty in reading far or close objects.
- has difficulty writing in straight lines.
- has difficulty threading needles.
- holds books very close to their face when reading and sometimes has tears.
- may complain of headaches or itchy eyes.
- fails to catch balls when playing.
- wears clothes inside out.
- arranges items incorrectly.
- brings the wrong objects when asked to bring something.

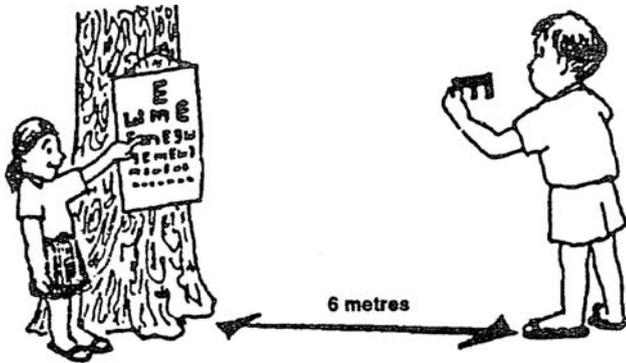


### Checking children's eyesight

Older children can help to make an eye chart. Each child can make an 'E' shape of the right measurement and glue it onto the chart. It is very important to give each 'E' the correct shape. It should be black on a light background and each 'leg' of the 'E' should be the same size and also the same size as the spaces between the 'legs'.



The teacher can make a stencil of the right size. The children can then make another 'E' out of cardboard or other stiff material. First let the children test each other. Hang the chart where the light is good. Make a line on the ground, six metres from the chart. The child being tested stands behind this line with the large cardboard 'E'.



Each eye is tested separately while the other eye is carefully covered. Another child points to the shapes on the chart. The child should point to the larger letters first and then to smaller and smaller letters. The child being tested must hold up their 'E' in the same direction as the one being pointed to by their friend.

When the children know how to give the test, help them think of ways to give the test to young children, especially those who will soon be going to school. At school, the children in higher grades can test the sight of those in the lower grades.

### ***How can we help someone who does not see well?***

- Let children sit in front of the class.
- Refer any child who does not seem to see well to a health worker.
- If necessary and possible, get the child glasses.
- A child who sees well can read with the child who does not see well and they can work together.
- Encourage children who do not see well to use their other senses, i.e. hearing, smell, and, where appropriate and safe, taste and touch.

## Follow-up

Find out if the children now understand what it feels like not to see well or not to hear properly. Ask them to say what it feels like either in a story, a play or a poem.

Can they remember the signs which tell us that a child may be having difficulty seeing or hearing? What can they do if they see these signs?

Ask one child to tell the others what they would do if they found a baby at home who did not see or hear well.

Ask the children if they know anyone in their families or communities who cannot see or hear well. Are they doing anything to help? What are they doing?

Have any of them been able to help a younger child who does not hear well? Let them tell a story about what they have done, and discuss it with the others.

## USING THIS SHEET

**Teachers** and **youth leaders** may be the first to notice that a child in the classroom is not seeing or hearing well. They can encourage children to identify other children who may have difficulty hearing and include them in their activities. Mathematics teachers can help in making the 'E' shapes.

**Head teachers** and **teachers** can do a great deal to encourage parents to send such children to school. **Children** can tell teachers, parents and other relatives about friends who have impaired hearing or eyesight. All children can help children who do not see and hear well and can make sure that they include them in their games and make them feel part of the group.