

Tiredness in Deaf Children

Listening effort and fatigue

You might have noticed that your deaf child gets more tired than hearing children. You're not alone – fatigue is common in deaf children. Here we explain why this is and how you can help your child.

Most people have times when they find listening hard work, such as when concentrating on someone speaking softly, or when trying to make out a single voice in a noisy environment. Deaf children have to pay much more attention when listening than children with typical hearing levels. This means they use more of their cognitive resources in listening effort, and have less energy for other things.

Deaf children may be more tired at the end of a school day than their hearing siblings or friends. This fatigue may have a significant impact on their learning and development.

“My 15-year-old daughter takes herself off to bed exhausted by 7.30-8pm on a school night.” – Parent

How does listening fatigue affect deaf children?

- Sleepiness in the morning or falling asleep on the way home from school.
- Inattentiveness or difficulty concentrating on work.
- Giving up easily as tasks become more difficult.
- Low frustration tolerance level.
- Mood changes.
- Changes in play activity (such as decrease in stamina or not enjoying some activities especially in noisy environments).

“Many people don't realize how exhausting listening, concentrating, filling in gaps, guessing the subject, and deciphering body language, lip patterns and facial expressions, is.” – Deaf adult

Can lipreading reduce listening effort and fatigue?

Possibly, but lipreading requires cognitive resources too. Lip-reading skills take time to develop and are limited by the vocabulary the child already knows. Also, many lip patterns are identical for different speech sounds. Research suggests that children with sufficient cognitive resources (like [working memory](#) capacity) can make use of lipreading to reduce listening effort.

“I think the fact that the impact of deafness doesn’t just manifest itself in communication isn’t well understood. It’s about the energy involved in lipreading and being attentive all day long.” – Deaf adult

Tips for dealing with listening fatigue

- Ensure listening is made as easy as possible, including the consistent use of [hearing aids](#) or [cochlear implants](#), and the use of an FM system, and by making simple adaptations to the environment to ensure background noise is kept as low as possible.
- Have quiet times in the day when your child can rest from listening.
- Encourage your child to understand their own deafness, and to talk to teachers, family and friends about the impact it has on them.
- Help your child to understand that being tired is OK.
- Encourage your child to explain to their friends that if they aren’t talking much it’s not because they don’t want to, but because they are too tired to concentrate all the time.
- Help your child gain the confidence to ask about moving seats in school if they can’t hear.
- Make communication [as easy as possible](#) for your child by facing them, having good listening and lighting conditions, and not standing in front of a window when talking.
- Help others who know your child to develop good deaf awareness skills.

Other causes of fatigue

While fatigue in deaf children is often recognized as related to listening effort, there are many other causes of tiredness in children. If you are concerned you should also speak to your child’s physician or teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing.

More information

- [Blog](#) by Ian Noon, a profoundly deaf adult, about his experiences of concentration fatigue.
- [Article](#) about research into listening effort and fatigue.
- [Study](#) on the effect of hearing loss on fatigue in school children.
- [Paper](#) on fatigue in children and adults with hearing loss.
- [Paper](#) explaining how learning issues in children with hearing loss are caused by incomplete access to speech.

This information is from:

http://www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/education_for_deaf_children/education_during_school_years/tiredness.html