Early Childhood Educational Programs

EARLY HEARING DETECTION AND INTERVENTION (EHDI)

Health care providers report childhood hearing loss to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). MDH then provides families with materials and connects them to local public health resources, parent supports, and deaf and hard of hearing role models or mentors. Parents of children who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing often have questions about communication, language, and educational opportunities. This fact sheet provides an overview of frequently accessed resources and where to learn more.

Know your options

In Minnesota, most families with infants and children who have a hearing difference work with their local public school district to decide which education options best meet their child's needs. Options provided by public schools are free for eligible infants and children. Families and school districts make decisions together through an educational plan, such as an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Individualized Education Program (IEP), or Section 504 plan, depending on the child's age and needs.

As your child grows and their needs change, you may want to learn about different educational options and supports. Understanding what is available can help you make sure your child's educational plan addresses their needs. You can also request changes if something is not working well for your child.

To learn more, visit:

- **Early Childhood Special Education** (https://dcyf.mn.gov/programs-directory/early-childhood-special-education-ecse)
- **Section 504** (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/504/)
- **Advice & Guidance** (www.pacer.org/advice-guidance).

Become an advocate for your child's education

- **Minnesota Hands & Voices** offers one-to-one support to families through their ASTra Program (https://mnhandsandvoices.lssmn.org/resources-information/astra). ASTra advocates are trained in educational advocacy to support families who want to learn more about special education law and the process of creating educational plans for their child who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- **PACER Center** (www.pacer.org) provides parent training and information for families of children and youth with disabilities or special health care needs from birth through young adulthood. Parents can find resources to help make decisions about education, health care, and other services.
- **Parent Advocacy** (https://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/resources/parentadvocacy) from the Clerc Center at Gallaudet University has resources that can help you be an advocate for your child. It includes information on understanding your child's rights, how to work with the school to meet your child's needs, and how to prepare for meetings with the school.

Early intervention for infants and toddlers (birth to 3 years old)

Early intervention for eligible infants and toddlers ages birth to 3 years old is free in Minnesota and Tribal Nations. Early intervention services help support families with their child's communication, moving, interacting and thinking. Services are accessed through your local school district or cooperative.

You can connect to these supports and services through **Help Me Grow Minnesota** (www.HelpMeGrowMN.org), which also provides many resources and videos. Parents, professionals, and other friends and family members can connect a child and family through the Refer a Child (https://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/Refer/index.html) page. Staff from the school program who work with young children and families will reach out to you to talk about next steps.

To learn more about early intervention and why it is important for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, you can watch a video on the **Supporting Deaf & Hard of Hearing Children Early** (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnv1INVkmxmsF8ZHH1N13vHvjqnxEFS17&si=r_oh6EBDIExOslZj) YouTube playlist. This video is available in American Sign Language (ASL), English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish.

Special education (3 through 21 years old)

You can work with your local school district to develop an IEP and/or Section 504 plan to support your child's education. Your child's learning environment will depend on their individual needs and also might depend on whether there are other learners with a hearing difference in their school district. Your child may learn alongside children with more typical hearing or attend classes with other deaf and hard of hearing students for part of the school day.

Specialized programs for children who are deaf and hard of hearing

You may also consider specialized instructional programs for your child. There are several programs for children who are deaf and hard of hearing in Minnesota and their families. Most of these focus on educating deaf and hard of hearing children together in a group setting. These programs may be housed within a public, charter, or private school. Private programs might have associated tuition or fees. Programs often have preschool classrooms, and some offer toddler or parent/infant classes. Some programs focus on a specific communication option, such as American Sign Language, cued speech, listening and spoken language, or a combination.

Learn more about specialized programs

Finding the right fit for your family may depend on your child's communication choices, where your family lives, and other factors unique to your family. Explore the included materials to learn more about these programs for young children and how to connect with them.

Note: The included brochures and flyers are from programs who have sent their materials to MDH at the time of this mailing, and there may be more programs available to you in your local area. Inclusion of these flyers is for your information and is not a recommendation or endorsement of any one specific program by MDH.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-3650.

This information was adapted from Minnesota Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Services' Educational resources, schools and programs (https://mn.gov/deaf-hard-of-hearing/hearing-loss/children/education)

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