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## Deaf Students with Disabilities

The combined effect of hearing loss and a disability presents a unique and complex challenge to professionals and parents. A review of the literature yields little specific information on successful educational strategies and programs for such children. The most important factor in student success is early identification and early placement in an appropriate program.

### Who are deaf children with disabilities?

A broad interpretation of the term "deaf with disabilities" implies a hearing loss combined with a disability generally needing services beyond those provided for a child with only a hearing loss. Examples of additional disabilities may include:

- Intellectual/cognitive disabilities
- Emotional and behavioral disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- ADD/ADHD
- Visual impairment
- Cerebral palsy
- Autism
- Orthopedic involvement, or
- Other physical disabilities.

This definition, however, does not describe any general characteristics of deaf children with disabilities.

### How many deaf children have additional disabilities?

It is hard to count deaf children with disabilities since many students attend schools without programs for deaf children and may be overlooked in demographic counts. However, estimates are that from 20% to 50% of all deaf and hard of hearing children have accompanying disabilities. Statistics collected by the Center for Assessment and Demographic Studies of the Gallaudet Research Institute support this. During the 2006-2007 school year, the Center's Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children and Youth reported 35,706 children in special educational programs across the U.S. Of the 35,706 students 23,538 were reported as having one or more "educationally significant" disabilities in addition to deafness.

### How are deaf children with multiple disabilities identified and diagnosed?

Schools have a variety of criteria for identifying deaf children with disabilities. Much of the diagnosis

is not substantially different from that for deaf or hard of hearing children without any disabilities. Developmental checklists may indicate problems in areas such as motor skills, self-help, and social skills. Academic or behavioral difficulties are often a clue. The child's ability to perform adequately in a specific environment (such as independent living skills, carrying out instructions, etc.) is also an important clue. Tests using norms are usually not useful because there are virtually no tests with norms for deaf children with disabilities.

### **What are the educational needs of deaf children with disabilities?**

The needs of children with disabilities vary greatly. They have different accompanying disabilities, function at different levels, and have different ways of learning. Some factors affecting each child's needs include:

- The configuration of the hearing loss
- The type and severity of the additional disability
- The age of onset of each disability
- The age when the child starts receiving appropriate educational interventions are provided

Another challenge is related to the age of identification of additional disabilities. Deaf children with moderate disabilities are often educated as students with a hearing loss for several years before the additional difficulties are recognized, thus delaying the services they need. In cases of deaf students with a severe disability, the opposite is true: additional difficulties are recognized early.

### **What about educational planning?**

All children in special education receive services based on a written contract called the Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP works best when it is the coordinated effort of a team consisting of parents, school personnel, and other professionals who work with the child and are responsible for educational planning and instruction. For more information about the IEP process: [Individualized Educational Program](#).

### **What materials and strategies are used with deaf children with disabilities?**

No single specific educational technique is appropriate for all deaf children with disabilities since each student has unique needs. Characteristics of successful programs include:

- A high level of structure
- Specific, clearly stated objectives
- A focus on the individual needs of each child
- Instruction that is step-by-step in nature.
- Practical experiences in natural environments
- Consistent routines
- Age-appropriate materials are important
- A focus on motivating the child
- Provision of successful experiences
- An emphasis on the student's skills in given situations, not on his or her limitations
- Over-learning (going over a skill after it seems to be mastered) is good and much repetition may

be necessary.

- Planning for the transfer of instruction to real life situations

Successful strategies for deaf children with disabilities are future-oriented; the goal is to prepare students to function as independently as possible once they leave school.

While the student is still in school, continuous monitoring of the program and of the student's progress is important to assess the effectiveness of the program for each student.

**How can I find service providers who are experienced in working with deaf children who have mental health or behavioral needs?**

Gallaudet University offers an online [Mental Health Services Resource Directory for Deaf Persons](#).

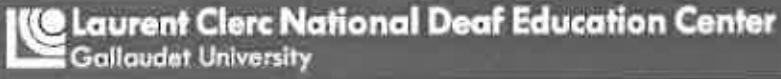
### References

Jones, T., Jones, K., & Ewing, K. (2006). Students with multiple disabilities. In D. Moores & D. Martin (Eds.) *Deaf Learners: Developments in curriculum and instruction* (pp 127-144) Washington, DC.: Gallaudet University Press

### Additional Information and Resources

- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder](#)
- [Cerebral Palsy](#)
- [Emotional/Behavioral Disorders](#)
- [Intellectual/Cognitive Disabilities](#)

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## **Educating Deaf Children: Additional Resources**

Deaf and hard of hearing children learn the same way other children do; from the people in their lives, by interacting with their environment, and from seeing and doing by themselves. There are increasing numbers of Web-based resources on a variety of topics developed specifically for deaf individuals, allowing them to watch videotapes made in ASL or interact with the web sites in various ways. This section lists resources that might be particularly useful to deaf children and the families and professionals working with them.

### **Additional Resources**

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