

Helping Children Who Are Deaf

Family and community support for children
who do not hear well

By Sandy Niemann,
Devorah Greenstein,
and Darlena David

Illustrated by Heidi Broner



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THIS BOOK CAN BE IMPROVED WITH YOUR HELP

If you are a community health worker, doctor, parent, or anyone with ideas or suggestions for ways this book could be changed to better meet the needs of your community, please write to Hesperian at the above address, or email us at hesperian@hesperian.org.

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Credits

Project coordinator: Darlena David

Art coordination: Sarah Wallis, Nicole Perez, Devorah Greenstein

Design and production: Sarah Wallis

Cover design: Sarah Wallis

Cover photograph: Devorah Greenstein (A deaf boy and his father in Haiti. The boy is using a sign he made up to describe the bright light from a camera's flash.)

Cover art: anonymous indigenous design, Panama

Additional writing: Todd Jailer, Susan McCallister, Nicole Perez, Tawnia Queen, Sarah Shannon, Sarah Wallis

Research assistance: Amina La Cour Mini, Nicole Perez, Tawnia Queen, Rebecca Ratcliff, Amy Wilson

Production management: Susan McCallister, Sarah Wallis

Field-testing and networking: Amina La Cour Mini, Nicole Perez, Tawnia Queen, Rebecca Ratcliff, Kathryn Young

Additional illustrations:

Sara Boore, Barbara Carter, Joy Conway, Christine Eber, Regina Doyle, Sandy Frank, Anna Kallis, Susan Klein, Joyce Knezevich, Gabriella Nuñez, Kate Peatman, Nicole Perez, Petra Röhr-Rouendaal, Mona Sfeir, C. Sienkiewicz, Sarah Wallis, Lihua Wang, David Werner

Copy editing:

Todd Jailer, Jane Maxwell

Proofreading:

Leona Benten

Editorial oversight:

Sarah Shannon, Todd Jailer

Update for 2015:

Kathleen Vickery, Jacob Goolkasian, Rosemary Jason

Update for 2024:

Dani Behonick, Amy Hill, Susan McCallister, Kathleen Tandy

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Elina Lehtomaki, University of Syvaskyla, Finland

Susie Miles, EENET, UK

David Morley, TALC, UK

Nancy Moser, Center on Deafness, UCSF, USA

Natalia Popova, Los Pipitos, Nicaragua

Shannon Reese, USA

Charles Reilly, Gallaudet University, USA

Rosalinda Ricasa, Gallaudet University, USA

Marilyn Sass-Lehrer, Gallaudet University, USA

Judy Shepard-Kegl and James Shepard-Kegl, Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects, Inc., USA

Andrew Smith, World Health Organization

Theresa Smith, American Sign Language and Interpreting School of Seattle, USA

Ester Tallah, Plan International, Cameroon

Abiola Tilley-Gyado, Plan International, UK

Andrew Tomkins, Institute for Child Health, UK

Joanne Travers, USA

Madan Vashista, USA

Susan Wecht, USA

Cindy Weill, Catholic Relief Services, Vietnam

Amy Wilson, Gallaudet University, USA

Sheila Wirz, UK

Doreen Woodford, Deaf Africa Fund, UK

Owen Wrigley, Burma



Medical reviewers

Peter Cooch, USA

Chris Forshaw, Uganda

Brian Linde, USA

Mike C.F. Smith, UK and Nepal

Shane Zim, USA

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About this book

In this book we offer information, explanations, suggestions, examples, and ideas to help you respond in a flexible and creative way to the needs of the whole child. Every child who is deaf or cannot hear well is unique and will be helped most by approaches and activities that are lovingly adapted to her specific abilities and needs.

As much as we can, we try to explain basic principles and give reasons for doing things. After understanding the basic principles behind different activities or exercises, parents can begin to make adaptations. They can make better use of local resources and of the opportunities that exist in their own area.

In this book, we define “a child who is deaf” as a child who is unable to hear anything. We use “a child who cannot hear well” to describe a child who has some hearing loss but can hear some sounds (many people call this “hard of hearing”). Sometimes, when we refer to both groups together, we use both terms: “children who are deaf or cannot hear well.” But sometimes, for simplicity’s sake, we use one term or the other, meaning to include all children with hearing loss.



ABOUT THE PICTURES

Since this book is written for people around the world who care for children with hearing problems, the drawings show people from many places. We hope these drawings will remind you that people all over the world face the same challenges you do.



HOW WE SHOW COMMUNICATION IN THIS BOOK

We show communication in 3 different ways in this book: speaking, thinking, and signing (using the hands and body to communicate in sign language).

When people **speak** we show it like this.



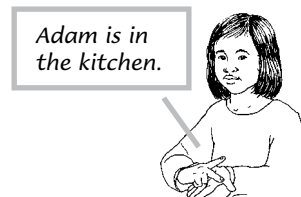
The rounded box that contains the words has a "tail" that points to the speaker's head.

When people **think** we show it like this.



The "cloud" that contains the words has circles that point to the person's head.

When people **sign** we show it like this.



The box that contains the words has a line that points to a person's hands.

THERE ARE MANY SIGN LANGUAGES

There are probably as many signed languages in the world as there are spoken languages. Signed languages are as old as history. They are not usually new languages recently invented. In many countries there is a national sign language for official use. Many countries also have regional sign languages.

Most of the pictures in this book show signs in American Sign Language because this book was written in the United States. (Some of the signs are in Mexican Sign Language or other national sign languages.) If you do not live in the United States, American Sign Language is **not** your sign language, and the deaf people in your community may not use or understand American Sign Language.

For example, although the spoken language in the United States, England, and Australia is the same, the sign language in each country is different. In the United States people use American Sign Language, in England people use British Sign Language, and in Australia people use Australian Sign Language.

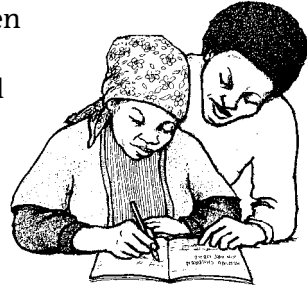
In addition, many of the signs in our pictures are made-up signs, or are real signs but not the signs that match the words in the text. They are simply shown to give the idea of using sign language.

So please do not copy the signs in this book thinking you are learning sign language. If you do, the deaf people in your area may not understand you. Try to learn and use your own country's national sign language. Deaf people who sign are usually the best teachers.



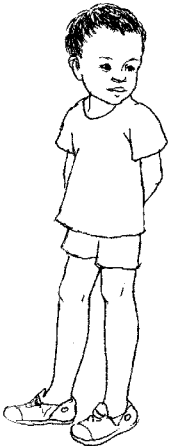
A NOTE TO TRANSLATORS

We hope this book will be translated into many written languages. From experience, we know that although the words will be changed, in many cases the original pictures will be used. We encourage translators to make an extra effort to change the pictures that include signs. That way, their translation could show signs that are actually used in their own country or community.



ABOUT THE WAY WE USE “HE” AND “SHE” IN THIS BOOK

Most books about children who are deaf talk about the children as if they are all boys and use the word “he” to refer to any child. This happens because society holds men to be more important than women and that belief is built into our language.



In fact, girls are not only left out of our language, they often receive less attention and care as well. This can include getting less food and getting less health care—both of which may contribute to deafness.

In a small way, we have tried to reflect a more equal world by using both “he” and “she” to refer to children. Because “he or she” is awkward, we use “he” in some sections and “she” in others. If at times this is confusing, please pardon us.

Remember, **all** children need and deserve our love and support.



TO START USING THIS BOOK

The first chapter of this book explains the kinds of challenges many children and families face when a child cannot hear well. Chapter 2 explains how parents and others can make a difference by helping children develop to the best of their ability. Chapter 2 also describes what you will find in the different parts of this book.

Within each chapter we point to other places in the book you might want to look for additional information.