



Dear service providers for deaf children and families,

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) is eager to collaborate with you in your service to deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. Service providers often have an intimate relationship with deaf children and their families, and the NAD is a resource to help ensure you are providing comprehensive, accessible, and culturally sensitive information to families that is based on research and recommended practices.

From the NAD's depth and breadth of experience, we know that too often, families of deaf children are compelled to choose one approach to language learning—speech *or* sign—which we know is a false dichotomy and often leads to language deprivation. As service providers, you have a critical opportunity to disrupt this false narrative to provide deaf children and their families the full range of language opportunities and services. The NAD wants to help you do this.

Below, we have set forth our principles for appropriate language acquisition for deaf children. You can see these principles explained in more detail in our position paper.

1. All families with young deaf children must have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate information and services, made available in the languages used by the family and by providers who are culturally and linguistically competent,
2. Deaf adults, including those from BIPOC communities, must be present and active in the EHDI system as early as the newborn hearing screening, acting as one of the first contacts for a family with a child who may be later identified as deaf,
3. Families should be given information about language acquisition, communication opportunities, and resources about deaf culture in their primary language. The materials listed above should be distributed to families at the same time that newborn hearing screening results around differing hearing levels are shared,
4. Families should be given access to one set of balanced information that also addresses cultural and racial diversity across all points of entries into the EHDI system,
5. States should measure and track language acquisition milestone achievement, service delivery, and language use of all young deaf children in *either or both* visual and spoken language,
6. Resources (in all languages needed by families) about language acquisition and communication shared by states, providers, EHDI programs, medical professionals, and the like should be balanced and informed, including information about the benefits of visual language,
7. States and the medical field must dedicate more attention to mobilizing deaf adults, including from BIPOC communities, to be active leaders in the EHDI system, including leadership roles at the local, state, and federal levels of administration, and
8. Training, educational, and preparation programs that equip medical and early intervention providers who may work with young deaf children must include quality information about the unique needs of young deaf children, including knowledge that language and modality are not interchangeable.

Based on your own training and professional experiences, you may recognize that these principles are not yet enacted in practice. We ask you to join us in improving the Early Intervention and Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) process for deaf children and families. When you meet a hearing family with a child whose hearing levels have been recently identified, the family may be uncertain and looking to you for information. This is an important opportunity to recognize that the family and child may benefit from connections with the Deaf community and deaf adults. Partner with local deaf-led agencies with deaf adult-to-family service programs so young deaf children and their families have opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with deaf adults. Provide information to families about visual communication and sign languages to the same extent that you do for spoken languages. Introduce families to other families with young deaf children who use various languages and modes of communication. Regardless of the language and communication options the family and child decide, it is important they are informed in these decisions and make them based on comprehensive information.

We look forward to working with you to ensure equitable access to resources for deaf children.