

This document aims to highlight suggestions and advice that can be shared by qualified Teachers of the Deaf (QToDs) with the staff in educational settings.

Introduction

Covid-19 has introduced face coverings into education. It is a recommendation, not a requirement, for masks to be worn in lessons. The use of face coverings in education settings will have an impact on accessibility to learning for deaf learners, as well as on their social and emotional well-being. The use of face coverings impacts deaf children and young people (CYP) regardless of their level of deafness or the development of their auditory skills eg

- speech perception abilities for CYP who rely on audition
- access to non-manual features eg lip-reading, mouth patterns.

There are exemptions that can apply to deaf learners, their teachers and their peers should they wish to take them up. This applies to those who:

- rely on visual signals for communication, or communicate with or provide support to such individuals
- speak to or provide help to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate.

Person-centred approach

The classroom environment may mean there are occasions when social distancing can't be maintained and a face covering is required. In order to support effective communication, the individual needs of the learner need to be considered. Some learners may rely more on audition rather than lip-reading.

- All face coverings impact sound transmission to lesser or greater degrees.
- Opaque face coverings impact access to lip-patterns and facial cues.

The QToD can support learners to identify their preferences and subsequently advise if staff should consider further reasonable adjustments such as:

- a face covering with a clear panel or a cloth mask for optimal auditory access
- the use of technology eg access to a computer/laptop operating a program that can transcribe as you speak
- the use of specialist radio aid/soundfield technology.

Beyond the classroom

Break time, lunchtime and movement around the setting are key times for social interaction with peers as well as coming into contact with other members of the staff. Continue working to ensure deaf awareness is known and modelled by the whole community. Find out from the deaf CYP how they experience these times and how they might like to be supported eg spend break times with a few friends in a quiet space.

In the classroom

Educational settings should maintain their child/young person-centred practice and have an individual discussion with each deaf learner to agree on the best methods to support their communication and interaction. Staff will already be aware of specific deaf awareness strategies recommended by the QToD that are specific to individual CYP eg

- Make sure you are facing the person and have their attention before you speak
- Try to maintain eye contact, speak clearly and naturally
- Repeat contributions from other learners in the classroom
- Take your time and be patient
- Repeat and/or rephrase, if necessary
- Use visual aids to support new vocabulary/curriculum vocabulary
- Allow learners time to complete the activity, appreciating that unlike hearing peers they cannot necessarily listen to or lipread their teachers, write notes and process their thinking at the same time

Guidance on accessibility where face coverings are being worn in educational settings - for use by QToDs when working with a wide range of other professionals

- Provide full transcripts of media material to deaf learners and copies of PowerPoint presentations with notes reflecting key concepts/key words to understand and learn
- Pace lesson with natural pauses and breaks to support processing
- Engage with the learner using comprehensive questions to ascertain their understanding and repair any misunderstandings or concepts/key words not heard
- Reduce background noise appropriately, noting that the need to maintain a ventilated space may increase the signal to noise ratio due to the open doors and windows
- Consider the seating plan to relation to the teacher's safe 2m+ position and exposure of noise from other teaching sessions etc due to the open doors/windows
- Effectively use any assistive listening devices made available for the learner (guidance link for hearing aid and radio aid hygiene is provided below)
- Consider approaches to reduce listening fatigue (a link to an online presentation about listening fatigue research is provided below).

SENDCo staff should continue to liaise with the QToD regarding targeted interventions:

- Offer pre- and post-teaching sessions to deaf learners with access to transcripts, allowing the use of listening/speech-reading/BSL (British Sign Language) in a well-ventilated and spacious room to allow for social distancing and to remove face coverings
- Explore deaf learners' access in the classroom to use live transcribing apps (ie Otter AI) and/or remote BSL interpreters
- Arrange for a well-ventilated and spacious room for deaf learners and their peers to use without the use of face coverings for break and lunch times to allow for access to speech-reading and socialisation
- Highlight, model and embed the revised deaf awareness strategies within the wider community in the setting.

Challenge

For CYP who use hearing aids, the optimal range for effective use is 1-2m from the speaker. The social distancing requirement of 2m+ inevitably means this cohort of learners is not accessing speech effectively. The requirement of a face covering for engagement within 2m further impacts the quality of sound heard by hearing aid users. This will further increase the level of listening fatigue and cognitive load experienced by the learner. In addition, the CYP may not appreciate how much they have not heard or which words they have misheard within a sentence. The class teacher may recognise there is a communication breakdown through the responses from the learner. The deaf CYP's QToD can identify through listening activities how much the CYP may mishear words and/or which speech sounds are impacted.

Other considerations

Each organisation's risk assessment will identify what is applicable within their setting regarding face coverings or combinations of face coverings and clear face visors. It is recognised that clear face coverings, face masks with panels and face shields may present the issue of glare which impact the learner's ability to have optimal access.

Deaf CYP are exempt from wearing a face covering. However, they may opt to wear a face covering as they may wish to be like their peers and/or want to minimise the risk of spreading the coronavirus. Staff should be aware that the deaf CYP's speech clarity may be impacted by the face covering. They should continue to implement and model strategies that are recommended for CYP with speech, language and communication needs to support effective communication with adults and peers in the classroom and during social periods.

It is recommended that teachers work with the learner, parents, QToDs, SENDCo and relevant support team to ascertain what strategies may work for them, whilst maintaining the required 'duty of care' responsibility to the learner and teacher/support staff member. It is important to note that each learner will respond differently and will need a bespoke response; also

different subjects will need specific responses according to the circumstances.

Useful links

Government guidance

England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education>

Northern Ireland - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-schools-colleges-and-universities>

Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/news/updated-schools-guidance/>

Wales - <https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-support-limited-attendance-html>

Other links

BATOD update - [Face coverings in education settings](#)

BATOD and ALTWG guidance document - [Cleaning hearing devices and radio aids](#) (free)

BATOD members' shared resources page - [Members' shared resources page](#)

Connevans - Generic 'top-tip for communication in a world with masks' [poster](#) (free)

Dr Helen Willis presentation on [research related to listening fatigue](#)

The Mooc Centre study - [Outlining the effect of face coverings and remote microphone technology](#)

NDCS - [Face coverings in education position paper](#)

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