



Mainstream News

Information about hearing loss for students, families and educators

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Each student's hearing and communication needs are unique, and therefore adjustments in procedures need to be made with your specific student in mind.

Safe and Sound: Communication Access Considerations for Emergency Planning



As classroom and school routines become established in the early weeks of a new year, safety drills are a part of this process. From fire and bus safety drills to evacuations, lockdowns and sheltering-in-place practice, the success of these procedures requires clear and efficient communication, but standard lines of communication during an emergency can present obstacles for a student who has a hearing loss. With this in mind, we encourage school teams to take a look at the plans that are currently in place and identify modifications that may be necessary to ensure communication access for your students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Almost every resource on school safety begins by emphasizing that there is no one-size-fits-all plan for schools. Each school is unique in its location, population, threat risks, technology, and local and state safety laws and regulations—all of which impact the specific procedures that are developed. The same holds true for students with hearing loss. Each student's hearing and communication needs are unique, and therefore adjustments in procedures need to be made with your specific student in mind.

What is true for all schools, however, is the importance of planning, rehearsing and revising until everyone is confident in your school's ability to respond to emergency situations and ensure that all students, including those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, will not be lost in the shuffle. The following are key considerations for students with hearing loss.

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Published by



Clarke Mainstream Services

Determine how your student will be alerted to an emergency.

Your student may or may not be able to hear traditional fire alarms at school. The ability to hear the fire alarm may also be impacted by whether or not your student is wearing his or her personal amplification devices, so it is essential to know your student's responsiveness under a variety of conditions as safety plans are developed. Depending on your building, there may or may not be visual alerts (strobe lights) in addition to the audible alarm.

For other drills, such as a lockdown, the public address system is often the primary means of notification, but it is likely your student will not be able to hear speech clearly over this system. A buddy can be one component of a plan, but this "can be haphazard, especially if the buddy is absent the day of an emergency or drill." (Whaley, 2001), so adults should be an essential part of the notification process. Your team will also need to plan how your student will be alerted to an emergency when he or she is not in the classroom. An alarm may go off or announcement may be made when students are in the hallway, restroom and so on. Do all teachers know who this student is and how to communicate effectively if the student must quickly step into their classroom? What will you need to review and practice with your student regarding these scenarios?

Incorporate visuals.

Each room in your school likely has a designated "safe spot" for students and staff to gather. Rather than just explaining verbally where this spot is, have a sign that is universally known throughout the school and posted in each room. This way, students will know where to go no matter what room they happen to be at the time of a drill.

Know to what extent your student needs access to speechreading cues.

Students with hearing loss use various combinations of listening and speechreading. Some rely mostly on listening, others may depend more on speechreading cues to help fill in what is missed through hearing. If your student is directed to an area where there is poor lighting, or no lighting at all, how will this impact his or her ability to access information? Don't assume that the FM system is all that you will need. A student may still need speechreading cues when listening with an FM system. And, an event or drill could occur when the student is not using the FM system. Background noise is also going to impact the student's ability to hear directions.

Mainstream News

is published three times a year (fall, winter, spring)
by Clarke Mainstream Services, Northampton, MA.

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Visual Alarm Requirements

"The American's with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) require that when emergency warnings are provided in new or altered construction, they must include both audible and visible alarms that meet certain technical specifications."

—The United States Access Board

To learn more about these specifications for public facilities, as outlined by the United States Access Board, visit: www.cfm.va.gov/til/dManual/VisualAlarmsADAAGTechBulletin2.pdf

Have a communication plan for when the student is and isn't wearing amplification.

There are many reasons a student could be without his or her listening equipment on a particular day. FM systems go out for repair, students forget their hearing aids, batteries die. Your student may function much differently without access to all or part of his or her listening devices. How will this change your presentation of safety instructions?

Be aware that the ability to hear safety instructions does not guarantee the student understands them.

There may be vocabulary or concepts that teachers assume all children are familiar with that the student with hearing loss has not picked up through incidental listening. The student may also have difficulty keeping up with the pace of communication in a tense situation. Keep directions as clear and concrete as possible. When preparing students for a drill, it is helpful to share with parents and support staff (such as the teacher of the deaf) the procedures, language and vocabulary that will be used so they can preview and review them with the student.

Add supplies to safety kits.

Emergency response kits are often provided for classroom teachers and school nurses. Are there items that would be appropriate to add to one or more of these kits? A flashlight to assist with speechreading, paper and pencils for written communication, and extra hearing aid or cochlear implant batteries are some suggestions. Consider making laminated cards that depict key directives that can be held up for the student/class to see when the teacher must use the quietest voice possible.

Address the needs of students with special needs, including those with hearing loss, when training staff on safety procedures.

There is always the possibility that someone other than a classroom teacher will need to supervise the student during a drill or real emergency.

Ensure the student's bus driver receives information about hearing loss so communication is successful during safety drills.

Typically, bus drivers are not part of trainings provided for school staff, so it will be important that the driver has a basic understanding of the student's hearing loss and the best ways to communicate directions during daily rides and when safety drills are conducted. Overlapping conversations combined with engine and road noise make it particularly challenging for the student with hearing loss to hear directions that are called from the front of the bus. The driver will need to remember to face the student with hearing loss and to have a plan in place for relaying messages through an older student or buddy about staying seated or vacating the bus. Providing the student's parents with a copy of safety procedures to review with their child before and after a drill will help clarify any misunderstandings. As with school staff, substitute drivers should also be informed of key communication strategies.

Practice makes perfect.

Conduct drills at different times, first with advanced warning and then without, and at times when communication is more difficult—during lunch, when the student is not using the FM or is not with the classroom teacher. Evaluate the performance of staff and students, identify any issues and strategize together when improvements are needed.

If videos are shown as part of safety education, select those that have closed captions.

Having the text available will help the student with hearing loss fill in any words that are missed through hearing and will reinforce vocabulary and key messages for all students.

Keep the lines of communication open between home and school.

Invite parents to be involved in the planning process. They know their child best and can provide information about his or her ability to communicate in stressful situations. Let parents know when a lockdown drill was practiced so they can talk to their child and report feedback to teachers and administrators. As appropriate and as much as possible, involve the student in developing and modifying plans that accommodate his or her communication access needs.

Our hope is that this article sparks a dialogue that is continued throughout the year so that everyone—staff, students and parents—has confidence in your school's preparedness. With sound procedures in place, the focus can be where it belongs—on the joy of learning together!

Resources

Dorn, M.; Thomas, G.; Wong M. & Shepard, S. *Jane's Safe Schools Planning Guide for All Hazards*, First Edition, Jane's Information Group, Surrey, UK, 2004.
U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*, Washington, D.C., 2003, 2007 (Revised).
Whaley, J. *School Administrator's Guide to Crisis Preparedness*, Aspen Publishers, Inc., Gaithersburg, MD, 2001.



Wil is a sixth-grade student who has a strong interest in helping others learn about hearing loss.

Dear Wil,

At school there was a fire alarm. The fire alarm was too loud. What should I do?

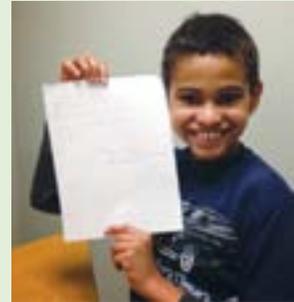
From,
Josias and Ms. Stinson
[his teacher of the deaf]

Hi Josias,
Thanks for asking this question. It's very helpful for people with hearing loss. One strategy is to put your hands over your ears so it makes the noise harder to hear. Another strategy you might think of is to take your hearing aids off while you are going out of the building. But, you would have to make sure to put them back on immediately when you regroup outside so you can hear your teacher giving important instructions and taking attendance. There is also the chance that your hearing aids could be dropped, damaged or lost in the process, so it's better to just cover your ears.

Editor's note:

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are programmed in a way that safely limits the maximum volume heard through these devices. This means that students will still perceive intensity of sound, but their devices will never be set to a level where loudness will damage their ears. Discomfort with the volume of the fire alarm as heard through hearing aids is not uncommon. Allowing a student to cover his or her ears is encouraged as Wil suggests, and is likely what peers will be doing, too. Fire alarms are uncomfortably loud for many of us! Students should also talk with their audiologists about adding a program to their device that would help reduce loud environmental sounds. This would be appropriate for students who are old enough to recognize that as soon as they are out of the immediate presence of the sound they need to go back to their regular listening program so they can hear instructions from the teacher.

Do you or your students have questions for Wil? Please send them to mainstream@clarkeschools.org.



How can I describe what I heard when the doctor turned on my hearing aids?... It was like when you're in a room where one of the lightbulbs on the ceiling isn't working, but you don't realize how dark it is until someone changes the lightbulb and then you're like, whoa, it's so bright in here! I don't know if there's a word that means the same as "bright" in terms of hearing, but I wish I knew one, because my ears were hearing brightly now.

—from the novel *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio
(2012, published by Alfred A. Knopf)

10 Tips for Helping Students Hear Brightly

While hearing loss is not the focus of the book *Wonder* (it tells the poignant, fictional story of a child with a craniofacial syndrome mainstreaming for the first time), it includes the chapter "Hearing Brightly" in which Auggie, the main character, gets his first hearing aids in the fifth grade. Auggie's description of the moment his hearing aids are turned on is something that is sure to strike a chord with many of our students and their families. Whether their journey has led them to hearing aids or cochlear implants, the experience of gaining better access to sound is powerful and precious. There is the momentous first activation and then subsequent upgrades to new and improved hearing aids or implant processors at various intervals over the years.

Access to appropriate, properly maintained technology is the first step toward hearing brightly at school. With each new school year, students continue to learn how to make the best use of this technology in a variety of activities and communication situations that are complex and ever changing. As such, we need to be sure we are creating learning environments that support rather than counteract the benefits of their technology. The devices your student uses help a lot, but your student will still not hear the same as his or her peers and will always be working harder to keep up with communication. Noisy, reverberant conditions will have a deleterious effect on your student.

The following suggestions, while critical for students with hearing loss, will help all of your students hear brightly. Even children with typical hearing require a better listening environment than adults, as their auditory systems are not fully developed until the teen years.



- 1 Practice good classroom management.**
Enforce the rule of one person talking at a time, pause for interruptions (such as announcements), and limit use of noisy devices (such as electric pencil sharpeners) to transition times.
- 2 Seat the student away from noise sources.**
If the student has better hearing in one ear, make sure the student's good ear is not facing a noise source. Be flexible with seating so the student can move for optimal auditory and visual access based on the activity.
- 3 Request maintenance of the HVAC system.**
Ask if the fan speed can be lowered or turned off manually during key instructional times.
- 4 Carpeting in as many areas of the classroom as possible is ideal.**
When wall-to-wall carpeting is not an option, area rugs or interlocking rubber tiles that can be placed in designated areas will help. When carpeting does not cover desk areas, place silencers on the bottoms of chairs and desks. Treat chairs and desks in the classroom directly above the student's classroom, too. This reduces the noise from moving this furniture across hard floors, which is often heard through ceilings in classrooms below. (Online resources include: hussh-ups.com, chairslippers.com, schoolfix.com, and flexifelt.com.)
- 5 Use absorptive materials as much as possible.**
This includes tablecloths, curtains/blinds on windows, and tapestries or bulletin boards on empty walls.
- 6 Build quiet areas by placing book cases or other dividers around an area rug or floor pillows.**
These quiet areas are a good place for the student with hearing loss to work with a partner or meet with the teacher one-to-one.
- 7 Pay attention to noise from adjacent rooms and hallways.**
Keep doors closed. Put draft guards or "snakes" at the bottom of doors that separate classrooms when there is a gap between the door and the

floor. Collaborate with teachers in adjacent classrooms to keep the volume from movies/music in their rooms down. This is especially important when classrooms are separated by partitions that allow more sound to pass through than solid walls.

- 8 Enforce quiet passing in the hallways school-wide.**
Re-route the way classes travel to the gymnasium and similar locations if foot traffic is particularly heavy outside the student's classroom.
- 9 If the student's classroom overlooks a playground, work with maintenance staff to schedule lawn mowing and other noisy tasks at a time opposite key instruction periods.**
Keep windows closed when unavoidable noise is present outside.
- 10 Avoid class pets that tend to be noisy.**
If you have a fish tank, keeping the water level high reduces filter noise.

Alex Can Hear!

An acrostic poem By Alex, Grade 2

Cochlear implants are fun!
Off my head I cannot hear.
Coils stick on my head.
Helps me hear!
Listen to my teacher.
Ear bones are amazing!!
A hair cell looks like a W.
Rechargeable batteries are important.

Internal implant goes to my cochlea.
My cochlea is made of bone.
Processors are tiny computers.
Love hearing songs!
Alex can hear!
Nerves go to your brain.
Transmitter is for teacher to use.
Super fun!

Kid Tested, Teacher of the Deaf *Approved!*

In our Spring 2015 issue, we began highlighting apps recommended by our itinerant teachers of the deaf for working on speech, language and listening skills, social conversation, organization and editing of writing and more. To kick off this school year, here are two more that are worth the (FREE!) download:

TocaBoca Band by Toca Boca AB

Suggested Ages: preschool +

Overview: TocaBoca apps made our list the first time around, and this is another favorite. Bright, interesting characters play a variety of instruments, creating a high interest platform for working on pitch discrimination and identifying and repeating rhythmic patterns. With an emphasis on exploration and creativity rather than competition, there are no limits to the combinations that can be made when students create a band or choose the star of their show, making this app perfect for practicing multi-step directions and critical elements as well.



Skitch by Evernote

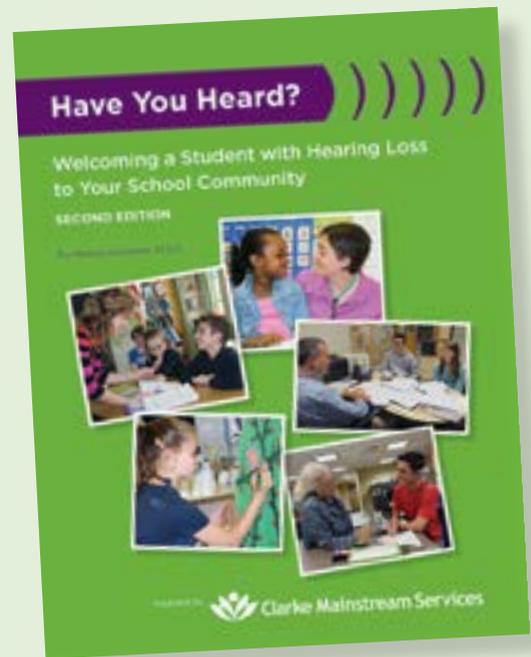
Suggested Ages: Preschool – high school +

Overview: Skitch is an app that we find helpful in working with students as well as with classroom teachers during trainings and consultation meetings. Skitch offers endless possibilities for marking up text and photos. Some ways we have used Skitch: labeling photos of FM equipment for use with students and teachers; photographing classrooms and marking optimal/detrimental seating locations as part of self-advocacy work with students and in teacher consultations; uploading worksheets or student writing in PDF format and highlighting key words, clarifying directions in margins, editing and more. Work can be saved and emailed, which is another helpful feature.

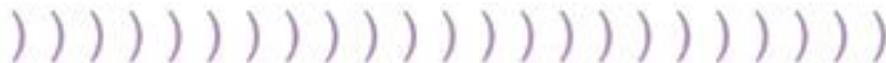


Do you have a favorite app that you use with your students? Send your recommendations to mainstream@clarkeschools.org.

Help the School Year Get off to a Smooth Start!



When there is a student with hearing loss in your school, the team of people who support this student will be keeping in close and frequent touch. But there will also be many other adults who will need to be familiar with some of the basic issues around working with your student. *Have You Heard? Welcoming a Student with Hearing Loss to Your School Community*, published by Clarke Mainstream Services, assists with this effort. Originally published in 2005, our second edition is hot off the press with a revised design and many new handouts added. From office staff, to the school nurse, cafeteria staff and more, this collection of handouts provides introductory information tailored to staff in a variety of environments your student experiences at school. A sample handout from this new edition is offered on the facing page for school teams to copy and share. Visit clarkeschools.org/store to order this resource and have a complete set of handouts at your fingertips.



A MESSAGE TO **Maintenance Staff**

This year, there is a student with hearing loss attending your school. Though you may not interact with this student on a daily basis, it will be important to know a little bit about this student and the role you may play in assisting with the listening devices the student uses. Along with the work you do to keep the school clean and safe, your interactions with staff and students make a difference. The positive relationships you form with them help them feel comfortable coming to you when help is needed. This will be especially true for this student.

Here are some things to consider as the school year gets underway:

Introduce yourself so the student learns your name.

Greeting the student and calling the student by name will help the student feel comfortable as he or she travels around school. Background noise makes it more difficult for a student with hearing loss to understand speech, so it is better to initiate a conversation in a quiet area. In busy places—such as the hallway during class changes or in the cafeteria—the student is likely to have a harder time understanding you.

When talking with the student, make eye contact and speak naturally. Exaggerating your mouth movements will not be helpful. If the student does not seem to understand what you are saying, try rephrasing it a different way.

Meet with the person in charge of the student's amplification equipment. This technology is essential for the student to hear as well as possible. It is also very expensive and contains parts that are quite small. Ask for photos (with labels) of each part to keep on file. This will make it much easier for you to help should equipment be lost or misplaced during the school day, or should you find one around school and the student or staff does not yet realize it is missing.



Know where the student's personal FM will be charged each day. You may be in the habit of unplugging things at the end of the day to conserve electricity as you clean each classroom. The FM system must remain plugged in. It can also remain plugged in over the weekend and school vacations. Be sure this information is conveyed to other workers who may cover your duties occasionally.

As you are likely responsible for keeping rooms locked when they are not in use, you may be asked to unlock an area for the teacher of the deaf to work with this student for their one-to-one sessions. Whenever possible, choose a room that is in a quiet location and not occupied by others. The student will have a harder time concentrating on what the teacher of the deaf is saying if there is a great deal of background noise or multiple conversations going on in the room.

You can play a key role in reducing background noise in and around the student's classroom. Hearing aids and cochlear implants will amplify all sounds, not just speech, so a student with hearing loss can have a much harder time understanding speech when HVAC systems are loud. Maintaining these systems and looking for ways to dampen the noise will be extremely helpful. If the student's classroom overlooks an outdoor area where you will use equipment such as lawnmowers, try to schedule this maintenance at a time opposite key instruction periods.

For more information about this student or about hearing loss in general, you are encouraged to contact:

Name _____ Phone/Email: _____



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Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech
provides children who are deaf or hard of
hearing with the listening, learning and spoken
language skills they need to succeed.

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**Join us for our
36th Annual Conference on Mainstreaming Students with Hearing Loss:**

The Sounds of Success: Believe It and Achieve It!

OCTOBER 22 & 23, 2015

Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel & Trade Center
Marlborough, MA

Prepare to be inspired and well informed after attending one of the nation's only gathering of its kind! Anyone supporting preschool through high school age students using listening and spoken language in mainstream settings will benefit from this conference. This annual event focuses on understanding and addressing the impact of hearing loss on a student's academic performance and social skills.



Visit clarkeschools.org/mainstreamconference to register and learn more!