Illinois State Board of Education
Special Education Services Department

Social and Emotional Learning for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Frequently Asked Questions

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to introduce social and emotional learning concepts for educators of students who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHH). This document aims to address the social and emotional needs of students who are DHH, typical areas of need, and types of social and emotional interventions appropriate for the population. This document is not an exhaustive resource or list of interventions.

Students who are DHH may struggle to develop social and emotional skills at a rate similar to typically developing peers. Ninety percent of DHH children are born to hearing parents who largely do not have experience with deafness or sign language. As such, communication and language development may be significantly impacted. If a child who is DHH has limited exposure to language, he or she will miss out on information learned incidentally like interpersonal norms and social language. The impact of language deprivation or otherwise limited access to language can be detrimental to the acquisition of several skills and typical areas of social and emotional development.

Children who are DHH may also struggle to develop Theory of Mind which is the ability to predict and understand how others are likely to act under certain circumstances. Without consistent access to language, children who are DHH may also struggle with executive functioning, problem-solving, and emotion regulation. According to the Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, "(D)eaf children are often delayed in language development, tend to show greater impulsivity and poorer emotional regulation, and often have an impoverished vocabulary of emotion language," (Calderon & Greenberg, 2003). Students who are DHH with additional disabilities such as visual impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder, cognitive impairment, or any other disability might also present with significant communication and social challenges.

A report completed by the National Deaf Center (NDC) on postsecondary outcomes explains, "Studies show that deaf individuals experience social-emotional difficulties at a rate as high as two to three times that of their hearing peers. Other studies report that deaf children and adults are three to five times more likely to have a serious emotional disturbance than their hearing peers. Some findings reveal that the rate of internalizing mental health disorders (such as depression or anxiety) does not differ between hearing and deaf populations, but that certain personality disorders and childhood behavior problems are three to six times more prevalent for deaf individuals," (2019).

Individuals who are DHH are also confronted with risk factors for long-standing mental health challenges because "there is an early or pervasive lack of communication access with

family members," and "access to necessary physical and mental health treatment services is lacking," (NDC, 2019).

Normand and Jamieson (2015) explain that it is crucial for students who are DHH to develop self-esteem and a healthy self-concept, regulate emotions and control impulses, and understand the pragmatics of social language. Additionally, "DHH children have been found to be vulnerable to feelings of loneliness and depression and to be at increased risk of behavior difficulties compared to hearing peers," (p. 274).

Not all students who are DHH present with social-emotional challenges or mental health concerns; however, it is important for educators to understand the possible impact of the deaf experience on development and be aware of areas of need.

A. Definitions

A-1: **What is social and emotional learning?**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adult acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to -

- recognize and manage their emotions
- demonstrate caring and concern for others
- establish positive relationships
- make responsible decisions
- handle challenging situations constructively

In the state of Illinois, social and emotional learning is a required element of instruction supported by state standards.

A-2: **What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the term used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

ACEs have been linked to –

- risky health behaviors
- chronic health conditions
- low life potential
- early death

B. Key Intervention Areas

B-1: **What is the intervention model for social and emotional learning?**

Many schools utilized the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model to organize and implement SEL instruction. MTSS defines three tiers of service for students based on needs.

At tier 1, schools widely implement SEL curricula or programming to teach basic social skills to all students. Tier 1 SEL interventions are typically taught by educators who are supported by clinicians or behavior support teams. At the tier 2 level, schools implement short-term interventions such as targeted skill groups for students who need extra support in areas including, but not limited to, executive functioning or anger management. At the tier 3 level, students with specific skill or performance deficits which impact their ability to access academic instruction receive special goal-driven services from a service provider.

Students who are DHH can receive SEL services at any tier. Some students may require intervention at multiple tiers such as access to universal instruction and goal-driven special services. Educators can use a Universal Design for Learning to implement tier 1 strategies specific to the population in the classroom at large. All students benefit from social and emotional Learning in areas like emotion regulation, self-advocacy, and problem solving.

As teachers might be the only adults who can effectively communicate with DHH children, it is important to remember that "teachers can have a major influence on children's emotional development and social competence," (Calderon & Greenberg, 2003). Teachers can become important stewards of social and emotional development for children who are DHH.

There are limited evaluation tools that are appropriate for the DHH population. Educators can utilize the SEL standards and performance descriptors to determine student needs.

B-2: **What are the key intervention areas for the DHH population?**

There are eight key areas for intervention for SEL growth with DHH students:

Social and Emotional Vocabulary: DHH students with limited access to language may not have adequate vocabulary to express their emotions. Educators need to evaluate students' individual knowledge of emotion vocabulary in order to determine how best to address additional language needs. Direct instruction of emotion vocabulary may be required.

Social Pragmatic Communication: According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, social communication includes "using language for different reasons, changing language for the listener or situation, and following rules for conversations and storytelling." DHH students may need direct instruction in use of social communication skills in order to master communication skills like greeting, informing, demanding, requesting, as well as reciprocal conversation, turn-taking, and using body language.

Theory of Mind (Empathy): Due to limited access to incidental information and communication with others, students who are DHH may struggle to understand the thoughts and feelings of others. If a student has limited vocabulary and lack of access to communication, he or she may have a hard time processing outside information in order to analyze the perspectives of others. This can cause challenges with establishing and maintaining social relationships and can additionally impact academic skills like reading comprehension.

Emotion Regulation: Students who are DHH who struggle with expressive language may have a hard time regulating emotions appropriately. If they cannot adequately communicate their feelings due to lack of either vocabulary or conversation partners who understand their language, the student can struggle to regulate challenging or difficult emotions. As a result, a student may present with challenging and age-inappropriate behaviors.

Self-advocacy: A student who is DHH needs to learn how to advocate for himself or herself regarding communication and functional needs. A student may need to advocate regarding equipment and interpreting needs, the ability to explain his or her hearing, and facilitation of communication with hearing individuals. Self-advocacy instruction includes skills for assertiveness, asking for assistance, and clarifying needs. Students should learn how to "repair communication breakdowns and advocate for their listening and learning needs appropriately," ([Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss](#)). [The Guide to Self-Advocacy Skills Development](#) developed by Karen Anderson and [Informal Inventory of Independence and Self-Advocacy Skills for Deaf-Hard of Hearing Students](#) developed by George Clark and Laura Scheele are examples of tools for evaluating self-advocacy skills in students who are DHH. Self-advocacy instruction can also include legal rights at the state and federal levels and how to interact with law enforcement. Self-advocacy instruction can also help students seek out further mental health supports if needed.

Problem Solving: Students who are DHH who struggle with language can also have a hard time using problem-solving skills such as identifying the problem and brainstorming solutions. The ability to problem-solve can enhance several other positive skills like conflict resolution, self-advocacy, and self-regulation. Psychologist Neil Glickman explains the use of problem-solving instruction as a cognitive-behavioral therapy modality in <u>Cognitive-behavior Therapy for Deaf and Hearing Persons with Language and Learning Challenge</u> (2008).

Executive Functioning*:* Executive functioning skills include self-regulation, self-management, organization, and planning skills. Without adequate language development, students who are DHH may struggle to develop these skills. Direct instruction in organization, self-management, emotion regulation, goal-setting, and planning may be necessary.

Culture and Self-determined Identit*y:* As many students who are DHH are born to hearing parents, they may not have an awareness of the rich culture in the Deaf community. While some DHH individuals do not identify with the Deaf community, the language, history, norms, values, connections, and social opportunities can be a benefit. A major tenet of Deaf Culture is that deafness is not a disability but a variation in the human experience. There is often a sense of pride within the culture. Instruction in Deaf culture can be helpful for students who are developing a sense of identity. Also, exposure to deaf adults in the community can help students understand that they have bright futures. According to Hoffman and Andrews (2016), "Deaf children can be exposed to both worlds - deaf and hearing - and both languages - English and ASL- through bilingualism and biculturalism in the school," (p. 426).

Students who struggle to communicate clearly with their families may also face challenges in understanding their family's cultural background. Teachers and staff can help students seek out information and facilitate communication when formulating a cultural identity based on various heritages and native languages. Building communication skills can also help students express personal identity factors such as gender or sexuality.

B-3: **Are there any SEL interventions specifically programmed for students who are DHH?**

At this time, there are few SEL interventions normed for DHH or limited-language students. The Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) curriculum has been used successfully for DHH students. Many educators utilize social and emotional programming already used in the school environment with necessary accommodations or adaptations to the material.

Other common tier 1 SEL curricula may present a challenge to educators as language might be too advanced and the need for adaptation tedious. Educators should consult and collaborate with SEL professionals familiar with deafness and sign language.

The [Illinois Service Resource Center](#) provides several resources for instruction in behavior management, self-regulation, Deaf culture, and other key areas.

It is imperative that SEL intervention and instruction occur as soon as possible. Early intervention and services in early childhood allow for students to begin developing skills which will lead to positive postsecondary outcomes. Supports and services should continue as long as is necessary.

B-4: **How does deafness impact the development of social and emotional skills?**

Students who are DHH may struggle to develop social and emotional skills due to limited access to information learned incidentally. Students who are DHH may experience language deprivation or delays which impact the development of skills such as social and emotional vocabulary, self-expression, self-management, social interactions, and other key areas. Not all students who are deaf or hard of hearing struggle with social and emotional development. However, it is important to consider the impact of language development, ACE events, and effect of additional disabilities on social and emotional development.

C. SEL Instructional Methods

C-1: **Who is responsible for the implementation of social and emotional learning for students who are DHH?**

Students can receive social and emotional learning intervention at any tier. As such, responsible parties include teachers and service providers depending on the level of need with which the student presents. Teachers often utilize tier 1 SEL strategies and programs in the classroom for every student, and the students who need additional supports receive instruction from service providers such as school counselors, social workers, psychologists, vocational specialists, and others. It is the responsibility of the IEP team to determine the student's level of need. Professionals and service providers who implement SEL for students who are deaf or hard of hearing should have knowledge of the population. Best practice also includes knowledge of sign language or other student-preferred modes of communication in order to break down communication barriers.

C-2: **Are there assessments that help educators determine social and emotional functioning in DHH students?**

Currently, there are no formal assessments which are normed for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population to measure social and emotional functioning. The Meadow Kendall assessment has been used in the past for the DHH population, but it has not been updated in several years. Educators can utilize SEL assessment tools commonly used by the school or district with the caveat that deafness may impact the results.

C-3: **What are challenges for educators looking to implement social and emotional learning for DHH students?**

Educators may face challenges such as lack of normed assessments and programming, availability of specialists familiar with the population, and a language barrier. Schools and programs can address challenges by consulting with specialists, researching population specific factors, learning sign language, and learning about Deaf culture.

C-4: **What are some teaching strategies or methods that can be helpful for students who are DHH?**

Any method which assists in the development of language or key social and emotional skills can be helpful for students. Educators should consider the needs and present levels of the students when planning social and emotional instruction. Below are some teaching methods or strategies which can be helpful for students who are DHH, but it is not an exhaustive list.

Direct instruction: Students may require direct, or explicit, teaching of vocabulary and skills which is very helpful for the DHH population. Direct instruction can serve as pre-teaching or main content instruction. Information taught via direct instruction can also help scaffold further instruction.

Use of visuals: Students may rely on visual information to learn. Visual supports are imperative to understanding concepts. Visuals may include emotion vocabulary, parts of hearing equipment, calming strategies, and problem-solving steps.

Video modeling: Videos provide visual input for students. Videos can include social scenarios or skills enacted by another person or the students themselves. Examples of video modeling may include social greetings, reciprocal social conversation, seeking assistance, using an interpreter, etc. Videos should be made with backgrounds clear of visual clutter.

Role play: Due to possible delays in understanding of social pragmatics, practicing social communication skills and specific scenarios help build an understanding of different situations. The nature of role play allows the student to make mistakes and receive adult guidance in a safe environment.

Social stories: Social stories or narratives are written to address a particular social skill or situation. Social stories should be written with simple language and include clear visuals. Social stories can be referenced several times to support the development of a skill or social awareness concept.

Use of literature: Use of literature supports the development of literacy comprehension skills and presents the student with a variety of situations to analyze and practice using empathy.

*Structured practice***:** Opportunities to practice skills in real time in a structured environment monitored by an adult helps the student build an understanding of social scenarios. It is especially beneficial for students to practice communication and advocacy strategies with hearing peers and teachers.

Exposure to role models in the Deaf community: Students who never see deaf adults may formulate the assumption that their deafness will "go away" by adulthood or might assume that being deaf or hard of hearing is considered negatively. Exposing students to adults who are DHH helps them understand that there is a future for them. Deaf adults in the students' environments helps "normalize" deafness for students whose families of origin are primarily hearing. Educators can also profile prominent figures in the local and global Deaf community such as actors, artists, musicians, dancers, athletes, business professionals, educators, and political figures.

C-5:   **Why is Deaf culture an important piece of social and emotional learning for students who are DHH?**

Individuals who are DHH may develop an identity which aligns with cultural deafness. "American Deaf culture centers on the use of ASL and identification and unity with other people who are Deaf," (Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, 2015). A culture is built on common values, customs, and norms, and may be aligned with a common language. Individuals who identify as culturally Deaf belong to a community with rich history, a developed language, and many common customs and values. Deaf culture includes a significant history of literature, art, traditions, folklore, and other factors contributing to a strong community and social group. Students who are DHH benefit from education about Deaf culture to help build a robust identity and engage in a supportive community. Not all individuals

who are DHH identify with the Deaf culture, but individuals can benefit from knowledge of a supportive and inclusive community.

C-6: **Where can I go for more information on social and emotional learning for students who are DHH?**

Please see the list of resources below for more information such as the Illinois Service Resource Center (ISRC), ISBE's Social and Emotional Learning webpage, the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, and the National Association of the Deaf.

The ISRC is an ISBE partner that offers behavior and SEL supports for students who are DHH, educators, and families. Supports include behavior coaching at school and home, professional development, parent training resources, and a lending library available to the public. Visit www.isrc.us for more information.

D. Resources

Illinois Service Resource Center

Illinois Service Resource Center: Social and Emotional Learning Resources

Illinois State Board of Education: Deaf and Visually Impaired

Illinois State Board of Education: Best Practices for the Education of Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Illinois State Board of Education: Social and Emotional Learning

Illinois State Board of Education: Social and Emotional Learning Standards

National Association of the Deaf

Illinois School for the Deaf

Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center: Mental Health and Social and Emotional Development

Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center: Deaf Culture

Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss

Centers for Disease Control: Adverse Childhood Experiences

National Deaf Center: Mental Health Care for Deaf Individuals

E. References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association: Social Communication
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