

***Hearing in Childhood Author Vesna Maric Doctor of Audiology
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While signs of severe hearing loss may be clear, milder forms of hearing loss are commonly branded selective hearing, inattention and behavioural problems. How would you recognise signs of hearing loss in your child?

Good hearing provides the basis for acquiring early speech, language and social skills in children, and later becomes essential for schooling. Even a mild hearing loss, or a hearing loss in one ear, can have devastating effects on a child's development, confidence and ability to learn. Early identification, intervention and monitoring are crucial.

The most common causes for hearing loss in children are frequent ear infections, genetic hearing loss, complications during pregnancy or birth, infectious diseases such as measles and meningitis, and syndromes known to affect hearing, such as Down's Syndrome. However, these problems are present in only 50% of children with hearing loss, while for others the cause may be difficult to determine.

For parents, it is important to recognise indicators of childhood hearing loss and know how they change over time. In the first few months of life, look for a startled response to loud sounds and a calming one with familiar voices. From around 6 months, babies should turn to familiar sounds, start babbling and understanding simple words. Later, any delay in speech or language development may signal a loss of hearing. Children with hearing loss may prefer to play alone, or watch and imitate others rather than taking the lead in games. They may respond inconsistently or inappropriately to questions, need a loud TV volume, or react with distress at loud sounds.

Keep in mind that hearing levels can vary with pitch; it may be possible to hear the rumble of an airplane in the distance, but have difficulty hearing parts of speech. As hearing levels can change over time, formal assessment of hearing is advised as early as possible if there is concern, even if hearing has previously been tested as normal. Reliable hearing testing can be performed at any age by **audiologists** who identify the severity and type of hearing loss, and make further recommendations for treatment.