

Deafness - Support card

No two deaf players are the same. Every individual's experience of deafness and the extent of their hearing loss is different. Get to know the person to understand their motivations, how the condition affects them, and what support they might need.

What is deafness?

Deafness or hearing loss, happens when one or more parts of the ear aren't working effectively. 'Deaf' usually refers to a hearing loss so severe that there is very little or no functional hearing. 'Hard of hearing' refers to a hearing loss where there may be enough residual hearing that an auditory device, such as a hearing aid can be used.

Football pathways

Deaf and hard of hearing players can choose to play mainstream, pan-disability and/or deaf-specific formats of football.

General characteristics

- Be aware there are different types of hearing loss symptoms that affect clarity of sound received rather than volume. Sensorineural hearing loss can affect hearing at different frequencies meaning individuals have a feeling that they can hear but they may not detect certain sounds, predominantly consonants such as sh, s, f, th, t, and k sounds.
- Hearing aids and cochlear implants enable people to make the most of any residual hearing they may have. Be aware that they do not restore typical hearing levels and they are not selective about the sounds they amplify which can make communication difficult in noisy and/or group environments.
- Remember, every individual will benefit from hearing aids differently. It is important to learn how well players in your care can hear and understand.
- Players are allowed to wear hearing aids and cochlear implants during football matches. The decision on whether to wear a hearing aid during a match is up to the player and/or their parents, not the referee. They must consider the referee's responsibility under Law 4 of the Laws of the Game. Should a device of this nature become loose when playing, then the referee should request the player leave the field of play for it to be made secure.
- It's important to understand that hearing aids and cochlear implants are not a total communication solution, many deaf people will use other means of communication such as British Sign Language (BSL), lip reading, Makaton, and finger spelling.
- Remember lip-reading is not a precise way of communicating – do not presume a player that can lip-read will understand every word and be aware that lip-reading involves a lot of concentration and can lead to tiredness.
- Group conversations can be difficult for deaf people.
- Ensure players understand safety procedures specific to the venue, consider evacuation procedures and signs, and ensure visual warnings are in place as well as auditory ones.

Coaching considerations

- Ask the players about their preferred communication method.
- Ensure you have the full attention of the players before speaking. You may need to be near them to attract their attention– by eye contact, waving, or tapping on the shoulder. Be careful not to shout when getting a player's attention.
- Ensure you are speaking in a well-lit area. If outdoors face the sun or light so your face is well-lit – this makes it easier for lip readers.
- Stay in one place and maintain eye contact when talking. Create an accommodating environment by removing or reducing background noise. Do not chew, shout, exaggerate lip movements/facial expressions, or cover your mouth with your hand when talking – this will prevent effective lip-reading.
- Keep sentences simple, limit your words to a maximum of three key points, and check players understand any football-specific terminology used.
- Use visual aids, e.g. coloured bibs for stop and start, whiteboards, or flip charts. If using a whiteboard allow players time to read the text before continuing with verbal instructions.
- Demonstrate, or get another player to demonstrate so the players can observe the task.
- Use peer learning or players on the pitch to pass on information.
- If working with a BSL translator, make sure you talk to the player/group directly rather than the translator and allow time for the translator to sign your words into BSL.
- Be aware of the impact of wet and windy weather conditions on background noise amplified by hearing aids and Cochlear implant units.
- Consider asking a player to teach you some football-specific signs or finger spelling to assist with communication during matches and training.
- Most of all ask the players if you are communicating clearly and if there are ways you can improve things.



Don't forget the golden nugget – Make sure your environment is always a safe and welcoming place to be!

How do I use STEP to support my communication with players?



Space – Ensure surrounding space allows for the coach to have a clearly visible position to communicate with players, and try to limit background noise.



Task– When giving tasks, face players at all times. Ensure consistency with verbal, visual and written communication, and allow time for players to read and understand the task. Don't speak at the same time.



Equipment – Use a flag or a bib as well as a whistle to stop play as a referee and as a coach.



Players – Use players in practical demonstrations to compliment verbal, visual, and written communication to help support players' understanding.

Step top tip:

Remember: STEP is a tool to help you coach, NOT a list of things you have to do. In order to use STEP effectively, it's essential you get to know your players so you can use the right modification at the right time to aid their development.

Additional resources

- England Football Website: Disability Section
- Disability Football Introduction Course
- UK Deaf Sport Website
- UK Coaching: Coaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing People Guidance