



Bullying - a heart breaking reality for deaf and hard of hearing kids

Most parents of deaf and hard of hearing children want their children to attend mainstream schools where they can 'integrate' more into 'normal' society. Sounds good in theory, but the result is that there are now more than 83% of deaf and

hard of hearing children attending mainstream school, where they find themselves the only deaf child in their class or even their entire school.

Studies show that 'not fitting in' is the most common reason students give for being bullied by their peers. Students who are physically different or who are regarded as not doing as well as everyone else in the class often become the target for bullies.



Hearing aids or cochlear implants already set a deaf student apart from their hearing mates. Then there's the sign language that they may use and/or their speech which makes them sound different.

Being considered 'different' is often the price deaf and hard of hearing kids pay for being in a mainstream school



A deaf or hard of hearing student has enough to contend with trying to keep up with what is going on at school, let alone having to worry about being intimidated by bullies. Most do not receive adequate specialist support in regular classrooms and get left behind their hearing peers, which makes them even more of a target for bullies.

Feeling isolated because of communication difficulties is a common experience for deaf and hard of hearing kids. Even with cochlear implants or hearing aids, deaf students find it difficult to hear in a large, noisy classroom or

schoolyard where the background noise is high. As a result, they often get left out of conversations and activities. And of course, being alone makes them more vulnerable to attacks.



The impact of bullying on deaf kids

Some of the more resilient deaf students who are subjected to bullying are quick to recover and remain relatively unaffected by it. However, for others these incidences can produce permanent physical, emotional and psychological damage including:

- anxiety
- depression
- isolation
- disruptive behaviour
- cuts and bruises
- social withdrawal
- deterioration of school work and academic failure
- increased likelihood of dropping out of school
- increased risk of suicide



Tom's story

Tom is a sensitive 10 year old who is profoundly deaf. He attends a mainstream school in rural NSW where segregation and isolation are part and parcel of his day. His bus route to school is a nightmare; he is regularly taunted by other kids who call him 'dumb' or 'retarded' because his speech is slow. He is often excluded from conversations because he is unable to hear what his classmates are saying if they are not facing him or speaking some distance away. When he tries to join in, they regularly say: 'No, Tom. You can't play this game because you can't hear us.' The look on his face as he walks through the door after a day at school often breaks his mother's heart.



***If we don't stand up for
children, then we don't stand
for much.***

-- [Marian Wright Edelman](#) (Activist for the rights of children)

Melissa's story

Melissa is a bright little 8 year old who is severely deaf. The kids in her class call her 'weird' because she sounds different to them. She has given up trying to communicate because they say they do not understand her when she speaks. Instead, they send her teasing emails about her hearing aids and sign language. She doesn't cry in front of them anymore because the last time she did, one kid videoed it on his phone and showed it to the other kids 'for fun'.

***Can we make a better world for our children? I believe we can, if
enough people are concerned and get involved in changing what is
wrong with society.***

-- [Dr. Benjamin Spock](#) 1903-1998, paediatrician and best-selling author



Josh's story

Deaf 17 year old Josh dreads going back to the boarding house because the four other boys there gang up against him, call him 'gay', mock his mannerisms and embarrass him in front of others. Why? Because they are bored... After riling him to the point of tears, they simply walk away and resume their homework or video games, as if it never happened. It's even worse at the mainstream school he attends. Once, as a laugh, they

held his hands behind his back so he couldn't sign. When he tells his teacher, she tells him to 'grow some courage and fight back.' He cries himself to sleep and often thinks of suicide.

It's up to each of us to help create a better world for our children.

-- [Dr. Benjamin Spock](#)

Please help us eliminate bullying...

What Deaf Children Australia is doing about the issue...

We aim to ensure that bullying is never tolerated



We encourage schools to involve all staff in anti-bullying procedures, to take bullying very seriously and to take immediate and consistent action against it. Most schools now have some form of anti-bullying policy in place. Anonymous questionnaires have been found to be very effective in helping to identify both the perpetrators and victims of bullying.

Teachers are encouraged to look for any telling behaviour in deaf children who may be reluctant to reveal what has happened to them. We assist schools to create an atmosphere of intolerance towards bullying and to ensure that anti-bullying measures remain effectual. Peer regulation of bullying produces far more results than teachers simply 'telling' students that bullying is inappropriate. Responsibility and investment at all levels is fostered by involving the school, families and the whole community in the implementation and upkeep of an anti-bullying campaign.

We provide deaf awareness training



Educating children and teachers about the needs of deaf students is a significant factor in the alleviation of bullying. Deaf children are far more likely to feel included in a classroom of children who are accepting of differences. All staff are invited to undergo deaf awareness training, to read about deaf issues and become more deaf aware. Deaf Children Australia offers deaf awareness workshops where teachers and students get to experience firsthand what it is like to be deaf in a hearing world. During the workshop, participants are not permitted to speak, but have to go through everyday experiences including going to a bank, a travel agent and a counsellor, using only gestures and no speech. Many have reported an overwhelming realisation just how frustrating it can be being deaf, which in turn makes them far more sensitive to the

needs of a deaf person. Students may then become more likely to look out for the hearing student rather than alienating them.

We aim to ensure that the needs of deaf kids are being met

We assist schools to make the environment more deaf friendly for the student: for example, by introducing a soundfield amplification system into the classroom which significantly enhances sound and promotes understanding and academic achievement. Hearing students need to be made aware of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students – such as facing the deaf student when they speak, using gestures to aid comprehension, and not blocking your mouth or turning away when speaking.



We provide individual support to the deaf child

When a child is being bullied, we work one on one with them to help them express themselves, empowering them to stand up for themselves in a non-aggressive way. We make them aware of their rights and the necessary steps to take when bullying incidents arise - such as reporting them to their teacher. We work with the school to ensure that the child's individual needs are being met and we assist

families to ensure that parents are both advocating for their child and providing a positive environment at home.

Our vision at Deaf Children Australia is-

[A life to be lived - deaf people empowered, connected and achieving](#)

Please help us prevent bullying of deaf kids!

Tanya's story

When a questionnaire determined that Tanya was the regular victim of bullying, the school contacted Deaf Children Australia. The whole class was put through a deaf awareness workshop and were taught all about ways in which they could help Tanya, not hurt her. A more 'deaf aware' style of teaching has gone a long way towards increasing Tanya's confidence in the classroom and the kids now look out for her.



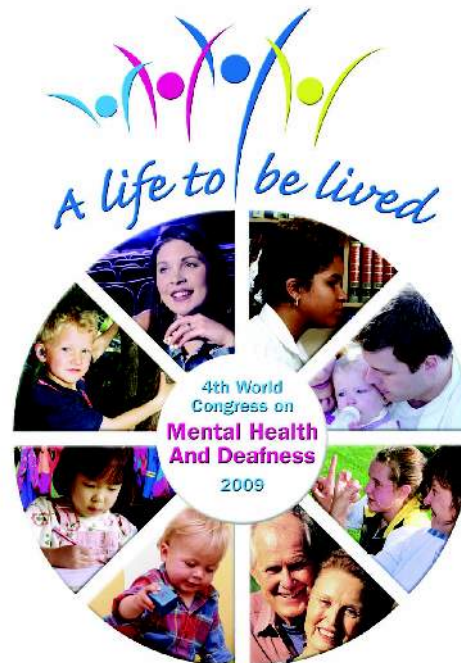
Skye's story

The kids in Skye's class used to copy her speech and think it was funny to cover their mouth so that she couldn't hear what they were saying. When Skye reported it to her teacher, she spoke to the class about the inappropriateness of bullying and encouraged the students to report it, should it ever happen again. The school then contacted Deaf Children Australia who provided the class with information about

deafness to promote greater awareness and understanding. One of our caseworkers worked with Skye to rebuild her confidence. She now feels happier and more part of things than she ever has.

***We want for our children,
as we want for ourselves,
lives at home, at work and
at play to be lives of joy
and peace.***

-- Betty Williams (Nobel Laureate,
Head of the Global Children's
Foundation)



October 27th – October 30th 2009

Don't miss out.

Put this in your diary TODAY!

www.mhd2009.org



Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre,
South Bank, South Brisbane, Australia

Hosted by Deaf Children Australia and Deaf Services Queensland

