

HEALTH BARRIERS TO LEARNING: HEARING PROBLEMS

Why are hearing problems a Health Barrier to Learning?

Unidentified hearing problems can impact a student's social development and academic success. Hearing problems in one or both ear can affect a student's speech, language, and behavior.

About 15% of school-aged students in the United States have some hearing loss. Students with unidentified hearing loss may perform worse academically and could be at risk at repeating a grade.

How can I tell a student is having trouble hearing?

Parents may find out their child has a hearing problem during a newborn screening. However, hearing loss can also happen or be noticed as children are growing up. Early diagnosis can prevent permanent hearing loss so looking out for signs could prevent issues from getting worse. The signs and symptoms of hearing loss are different for each child. As a teacher, you may notice the following signs in the classroom:

- Does not speak clearly
- Does not follow directions (you may think they are not paying attention or just ignoring you)
- Often says, "Huh?"
- Declining academic performance
- Has no reaction to loud noises
- Shows no response to your voice
- Complains of earaches, ear pain or head noises

What can I do in the classroom?

If you think a student is having trouble hearing, **talk to the school nurse and the student's family**. A student may have an undiagnosed hearing problem and may need to see a doctor. Sometimes an ear infection may make it seem like a child has a hearing problem, but the doctor will help determine what is causing the hearing loss.

Monitor students who have diagnosed hearing problems. Make sure they are properly managing their condition and are using the appropriate aid devices. Talk to their parents to find out how you may need to accommodate them in the classroom.

Create a supportive environment for students who may have trouble hearing, avoid activities with loud or piercing noises and ask all students to speak at an audible level. Normalize the issue so that students feel comfortable in the classroom.

Bess, F.H., Dodd-Murphy, J., & Parker, R.A. (1998). Children with minimal sensorineural hearing loss: Prevalence, educational performance, and functional status. *Ear and Hearing, 19*, 339-354.

Prevalence of Hearing Loss Among Children 6 to 19 Years of Age. The Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Amanda Sue Niskar, RN, BSN, MPH; Stephanie M. Kieszak, MA, MPH; Alice Holmes, PhD, CCC-A; Emilio Esteban, DVM, MBA, PhD; Carol Rubin, DVM, MPH; Debra J. Brody, MPH. *JAMA*. 1998;279(14):1071-1075. doi:10.1001/jama.279.14.1071. Accessed from: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=187415>