


# Children of Deaf Adults

## CODA

A **child of a deaf adult**, often known as **CODA (Child Of Deaf Adult)**, is a person who was raised by a deaf parent or guardian. Many CODAs identify with both deaf and hearing cultures.



Over 90% of Deaf adults have hearing children. Hearing children born to Deaf parents often experience a balance between two worlds: the culture and language of their Deaf parents, and the “hearing world” of their friends and teachers.



Most hearing people have not had much exposure to Deaf people and their families. If you are a hearing person, ask yourself what you know about Deaf people, their culture, their parenting styles, and their ability to navigate their way in your “hearing world”?

It is important to understand some of the communication and social interaction patterns that are part of Deaf/Hearing relations, including interactions within the family of a Deaf parent and hearing child.

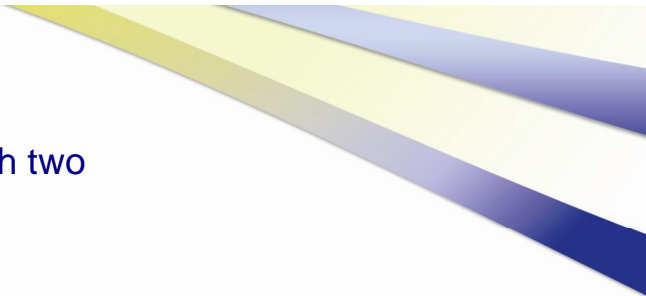
**1. A hearing child of Deaf parents may be considered bilingual in British Sign Language and English (or trilingual if another spoken language dominates their home environment).**

A child who is a native signer of BSL should not be considered language-impaired or language-delayed. Instead, that child is most likely acquiring two languages (BSL and spoken English) and experiences life as a bilingual. If, however, it does appear that a hearing child of Deaf parents is showing signs of significant spoken language delay, then a culturally appropriate, practical family-centred plan to enhance the child’s spoken language input would be in order. Natural supports such as play groups, preschool, or time spent with hearing relatives would dramatically increase exposure to spoken language. Researchers maintain that a hearing child in a BSL-using household will greatly benefit by being provided with natural supports for all of the languages that will be culturally relevant to that child.

**2. Diversity in family communication patterns**

While British Sign Language is a legitimate and rich language for family interaction, it is important to note that families that include Deaf and hearing members may be using different communication systems, even within the family. Deaf parents may or may not choose to use BSL with their hearing children, instead using speech or a combination of speech and signs, depending on the communication demands of the context and/or personal preference.





### 3. Hearing children of deaf parents may identify with two cultural identities: hearing and Deaf.

A hearing child of Deaf parents is in the unusual position of being raised within a “Deaf world,” but when they become an adult, they are expected to join the “hearing world”... after all, they are not deaf. Some children may experience confusion about their two worlds and are unsure of who they are or where they’ll fit in when they grow up. As with many youngsters who are establishing their identities, this process requires sensitivity and input from knowledgeable, concerned adults who are aware of the complexities of navigating two very different cultures.

### **Assumption: Children of deaf parents will have difficulty learning how to speak.**

**Fact:** Although some hearing children of deaf parents have been sent to speech therapists, this is usually because other people anticipate speech problems rather than because problems are actually observed. This still raises the often asked question, ‘How do hearing children of deaf parents learn how to speak?’ In most cases, these children are exposed to spoken language through relatives, playmates, and in some cases, deaf parents who have spoken English skills. However, even hearing children who apparently have no early exposure to spoken language still learn how to speak. This may be explained by recent studies which suggest that the development of spoken language is a fundamental human trait, and depends more upon internally driven development than upon external models.