



# Working Effectively with Deaf Parents

A practical guide to accessible appointments, professional communication support and equitable parental participation.

## **INTENDED AUDIENCE**

Education, health and social care

A practical professional resource to support respectful, individualised practice with Children of Deaf Adults and their families. CODA identity is not itself a diagnosis, deficit, safeguarding indicator or support need.

## **SCOPE AND STATUS**

This is general professional guidance, not legal advice, a statutory procedure or a substitute for local safeguarding policies. Duties differ across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland. Verify local requirements before applying this resource.

## Start with direct and respectful communication

Ask each Deaf parent how they prefer to communicate in each setting. Do not assume that a person who signs will prefer the same interpreter or communication channel in every context. Some prefer BSL, ISL, another language, speech-to-text, lipreading, written English or a combination.

Address parents directly rather than speaking to a family member, interpreter or child as though they are the decision-maker. Provide time for questions, clarify unfamiliar terminology and summarise agreed actions.

- Record language, modality and format preferences with consent.
- Provide appointment details and changes in accessible formats.
- Test video access, lighting and layout before remote meetings.

### PRACTICE TIP

Ask “What would make this appointment work well for you?” rather than “Can your child translate?”

## Accessible service design

In Great Britain, the Equality Act 2010 reasonable-adjustments duty is relevant to services and public functions; the exact application depends on context. In NHS and publicly funded adult social care in England, the Accessible Information Standard also sets out sector-specific expectations.

In Ireland, the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 provides statutory rights and duties in defined public-service circumstances; the precise scope should be checked. BSL and ISL are distinct languages, and Northern Ireland requires separate consideration of its legal and service frameworks.

- Plan interpreting budgets and booking routes in advance.
- Provide accessible notices, letters, consent materials and complaints routes.
- Use qualified interpreters suitable for the setting and any specialist subject.

## Involving parents in decisions

Obtain the parent’s views directly and ensure they understand the issue, options, consequences and next steps. For sensitive or contested decisions, check comprehension without treating Deafness as a lack of capacity.

Use an interpreter who can manage confidentiality, impartiality and technical language; arrange sufficient time and avoid placing the child in a conflict of loyalty.

- Send an accessible agenda before important meetings.

- Offer written summaries of decisions, responsibilities and review dates.
- Check what accessibility adjustments would help at the next meeting.

## When communication breaks down

If an interpreter fails to attend or technology is unavailable, avoid pressing ahead with a non-urgent complex decision through a child. Explain the problem, agree safe interim steps and rearrange promptly.

For urgent situations, follow the service's emergency communication procedures and arrange suitable remote or in-person professional interpreting as quickly as possible; document unavoidable limitations.

- Apologise and take responsibility for service access failures.
- Do not label the parent "non-compliant" until access barriers have been examined.
- Record repairs to the process rather than relying on one-off workarounds.

## Team reflection

Review the parent journey from booking to feedback: a service can have an interpreter at one appointment and still be inaccessible at reception, by telephone, or in follow-up correspondence.

- Who notices a parent's access needs?
- Who authorises and books interpreting?
- Can a parent complain without using a child?
- Can the parent receive a copy of records and decisions accessibly?

## Professional references and further reading

Equality Act 2010 / reasonable adjustment guidance (Great Britain) — <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reasonable-adjustments-a-legal-duty/reasonable-adjustments-a-legal-duty>

NHS England, Accessible Information Standard (2025 revision) — <https://www.england.nhs.uk/accessible-information-standard/>

Irish Sign Language Act 2017, sections 3, 6 and 7 (Ireland) — <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/40/enacted/en/html>

### PUBLICATION REVIEW NOTE

For public publication, arrange review by suitably experienced Deaf community representatives, CODAs and the relevant education, clinical or safeguarding leads. Re-check current law, policy and organisational procedures at the time of use.