



PARENTS & FAMILIES / FREE RESOURCE

Growing Up in Deaf and Hearing Communities

Exploring languages, culture, identity and belonging together.

FOR: Parents, carers and older children

This guide invites curiosity about different communities while recognising that no child is required to identify in any one way.

Every family is different. Every CODA story matters.

Different communities, connected lives

Language and culture can shape family experiences in many ways.

Deaf culture is diverse

Deaf people and families are not a single group. Some use BSL, some use ISL, some use spoken language or other communication approaches, and many use combinations. Experiences also differ by geography, generation and identity.

BSL and ISL are different languages

British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language are separate languages. Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland have their own linguistic and community contexts. Never assume one form of signing is shared by everyone.

CODA perspectives vary

Some CODAs consider themselves part of both Deaf and hearing communities; others connect more to one or neither. Identity belongs to the individual.

It is possible to celebrate a family's heritage while also respecting a young person's independence.

Conversations across generations

Curiosity and mutual respect can strengthen connection.

Explore together

- Share family memories about language, friendships and community events.
- Ask an older family member what Deaf community life was like when they were young.
- Talk about how school, technology and access have changed.
- Invite your child to share which parts of the story feel meaningful to them.

When people make assumptions

A child might be asked to speak for Deaf people or explain their parents. Help them practise a respectful boundary: “That’s personal,” or “You can ask my parent directly.”

Learning across communities

Community events, age-appropriate resources and friendships can offer rich opportunities to learn. Ask whose voices are represented and seek resources created by Deaf people and CODAs.

Your notes or next steps

Which family traditions would we like to pass on?

What do we want to learn from another generation?

Our community conversation page

Use these prompts together, if you wish.

My family's languages and communication

- We communicate in ways that work for us: _____
- A word, sign or tradition important to me: _____

Our connections

- People or places that make me feel I belong: _____
- One thing I'd like others to understand: _____

Looking ahead

- A community activity I'd like to try: _____
- Something I want to learn more about: _____

Further exploration

CODA UK & Ireland community activities and reputable Deaf-led resources can be a starting point. Families may also find it helpful to speak directly with organisations representing relevant Deaf and signing communities.

There is no single right answer to these questions.