



Making group nights and trips inclusive for deaf children and young people

Advice for Woodcraft Folk groups

Woodcraft Folk
Education for Social Change

Introduction

This advice is a compilation of ideas from Woodcraft Folk volunteers at Venturer Camp 2013, supported by a trainer from the National Deaf Children's Society. Many tips are based on real experiences of supporting young people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment.

A note about hearing aids

You might not notice immediately whether someone is wearing a hearing aid – for example if the child or young person has long hair that covers their ears. Group Leaders should check which members of the group use hearing aids, and ensure other Leaders know and remember.

It is important for people to understand that hearing aids don't make hearing levels completely 'normal'. They amplify what residual hearing the person has so some sounds may never be audible, even with hearing aids. There can also be some distortion of sound and a mismatch between close up and background noise. The advice below about communicating with young deaf people, eg making sure you have eye contact before speaking, still applies for communicating with people who are wearing hearing aids.

General communication tips

- Ask what sort of communication the deaf child / young person prefers, eg whether they use sign language, whether they can lip read, whether they can hear you if you're close to them while speaking.
- Make eye contact before you start speaking to the child / young person.
- Face the deaf child / young person while you're talking to them.
- Use clear gestures to help communicate what you're saying.
- Don't obscure your face while you're talking.
- Be patient and friendly.
- Don't be patronising.

Group Nights

- Leaders should think about the games that they play on a regular basis and stop to consider if any of them are unsuitable for deaf children, even if the child appears to manage well with ordinary conversation. Examples of these include games that rely on being able to whisper and / or hear whispers (it's very hard to whisper if you are deaf) and games that involve being blindfolded and having to listen for someone creeping up on you.
- Many of the things that are helpful to children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders are also helpful to deaf children – see <http://woodcraft.org.uk/toptipsforinclusion>.



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- Getting everyone's attention: use a clear visible action, such as patting your shoulders, or sticking your arms in the air, that everyone joins in with when they see it.
- Circles are a good shape for the group to sit / stand in – make sure the deaf children / young people are opposite you when you're speaking, and that the circle (eg on camp) isn't too big to see faces across.
- Wait till everyone is quite before starting to explain something.
- Be aware that the deaf child / young person may not find it easy to interject in an animated group discussion – suggest people speak one at a time, raising their hand before they speak to everyone knows who is about to speak.
- Consider learning sign language as a group, starting off with creating sign nick names for yourselves.

Overnight Trips

- Plan who will wake the deaf child if there is a fire alarm or other emergency at night. Depending on the age and maturity of the children, either an adult who is sleeping nearby should be aware of needing to wake the child or a hearing child / young person could be nominated as a buddy and have this role.
- When doing activities such as water sports, make sure there is a visual safety signal that the child and instructor are both clear about using.
- If the child is able to hear speech at very close quarters when not wearing their hearing aids - have a nominated person who will get close to them and make sure they have understood any subsequent instructions through the activity session.
- Waking the child / young person at camp: they will probably sleep through the rising cry and calls from outside their tent. Agree in advance how they will be woken. This could be by unzipping the tent, and giving their foot a shake! Clan leaders should be reminded that the child / young person needs to be woken in this way if they are to be expected to take part in preparing breakfast!

Hearing aids on a trip

- Be aware that hearing aids are not worn at night - lying on them causes feedback and whistling.
- If the child is not able to look after their own hearing aids on an overnight trip, this could be a job for the first aider, clan leader or a friendly DF. Just ask the parents what's needed - it will only take five minutes to show you what to do. This would include looking after spare batteries (and knowing how to fit them) and a bit of basic cleaning and maintenance (how to clear out blocked wax and re-tube the hearing aids, should they need it while you are away).
- Even if the child is able to manage their own hearing aids, it is a good idea to keep some spare batteries in the camp first aid kit any way.
- Hearing aids are easily damaged by damp so they should be stored in a dry place overnight - leaving them lying beside your sleeping bag on a tent floor is not a good idea! There are commercially available 'dry pots' but any plastic tub with a

well-fitting lid and some silica gel sachets (that come in shoe boxes etc.) work really well too.

- Having to remove their hearing aids shouldn't preclude most children from taking part in water sports or other wet activities. Discuss with the instructors how to manage giving the child information and have the first briefing session on dry land before taking the hearing aids out.
- A nominated person should look after the hearing aids in a dry place and remember to return them to the child as soon as possible after they have finished the sport, showering etc. The onus should not be on the child to have to go and find the adult and ask for the hearing aids to be returned.



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