



PARENT HANDBOOK

First Steps to Early Intervention

WELCOME TO THE DEAF CONNECT FAMILY.

FOREWORD FROM EMINA

“ As you begin your journey with us, I want you to know that you are not alone. Every family’s experience is unique and valid, and we are honoured to be by your side. At Deaf Connect, our approach is grounded in respect, kindness, and genuine support. My team and I have worked with many families as they navigate new experiences and decisions.

We understand the importance of clear information, practical guidance, and a safe space to explore all the possibilities for your child and family. Our commitment is to empower you with choices, respect your decisions, and connect you to a community that’s always here for you.

This handbook is a resource to help you understand the services, supports, and connections available to your family. We hope it serves as a source of confidence and encouragement as you discover what is possible for your child.



Warm regards,

EMINA SULJIC

General Manager, Therapy & Family Services

FOREWORD FROM KATE

“ As a Deaf woman and General Manager of Education at Deaf Connect, I want to welcome you and your family with warmth and understanding. My own journey has shown me the richness and pride that comes with a developing Deaf identity – it’s an evolving journey deeply connected to culture, language, and community. At Deaf Connect, we see being deaf as adding to the rich diversity of the human experience.

I hope your family finds belonging, pride, and strong community connections here. We want every family to know that they are supported, valued, and never alone on this journey. Our team is here to help you every step of the way, and we believe in the power of belonging to a community.

Many families connect with other parent networks and organisations. We support collaboration across the sector and are always happy to guide you toward the right support. We are committed to celebrating being deaf in all its diversity.



With my warmest wishes,

KATE MATAIRAVULA
General Manager, Education

PART 1: YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE

UNDERSTANDING THE DEAF EXPERIENCE

Finding out your child is deaf or hard of hearing can bring a mix of emotions.

It's important to know that whatever you are feeling is valid. This is the start of a new chapter for your family.

The deaf experience is diverse, with a wide range of what can be heard and processed for each individual. Some children are born deaf, and others become deaf later in life. There are many ways to be deaf or hard of hearing, and each one is a valid part of the human experience.

At Deaf Connect, we celebrate this diversity. We support all children and families, no matter where they are on their journey.



THE POWER OF EARLY INTERVENTION

Finding out your child is deaf or hard of hearing opens up a new world of possibilities for your family.

It's a journey of discovery, and the steps you take in these early days can make a difference for your child's future. Early intervention is not about "fixing" anything; it's about providing your child and your family with the tools, language, and support to build a strong foundation for a happy and fulfilling life. It's about connection, communication, and confidence.

WHY THE EARLY YEARS MATTER

From birth to age five, a child's brain develops quickly. This period is a critical window for learning, especially for language. Babies' brains are wired to absorb language from the world around them, whether that language is spoken or signed. Giving your child rich and accessible language from the very beginning is one of the greatest gifts you can offer.

Early access to language sets the stage for everything that follows. It's the foundation for:



Cognitive Development: Language helps children think, reason, and understand the world. It's how they learn to solve problems and make sense of their experiences.



Social Skills: Through language, children learn to share their feelings, make friends, and connect with others. This builds their confidence and sense of belonging.



Emotional Wellbeing: When children can express their needs and emotions, and understand the feelings of others, they feel more secure and understood. This is vital for their mental health.



Future Learning: A strong language foundation makes learning to read and write much easier later on. It opens the door to education and lifelong learning.

For a deaf or hard of hearing child, the key is ensuring they have access to language as soon as possible. Early intervention services are designed to make this happen, providing your family with the guidance and resources you need right from the start.

BUILDING COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS

One of the most important decisions you will make is how your family will communicate.

There is no single “right” way, and what matters most is choosing an approach that gives your child access to language. Early intervention helps you explore these choices in a supportive environment.

Our team can guide you through the different communication options, which may include:



Auslan (Australian Sign Language): The language of Australia’s deaf community, Auslan is a rich, visual language that allows for full expression and deep connection. Learning Auslan can connect your child to a vibrant culture and proud community.



Spoken Language: With the help of technology like hearing aids or cochlear implants, many children develop spoken and listening skills.



A Bilingual Approach: Many families choose to use both Auslan and spoken language. This bilingual approach allows your child to communicate in different settings and connect with both the deaf and hearing communities.

Early intervention is not about pushing one option over another. It’s about empowering you with information and support so you can make an informed choice. Our specialists will work with you to find a communication approach that builds on your family’s strengths and helps you create strong, loving bonds with your child.



A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Early intervention is about more than just language. It takes a holistic view, supporting every area of your child's development and the wellbeing of your whole family. At Deaf Connect, we see you, your child, and your family as a whole. Our goal is to help you build the skills and confidence to navigate your journey together.

Our services focus on:



Play and Social Skills: We help your child learn to interact with others, take turns, and build friendships through fun, play-based activities.



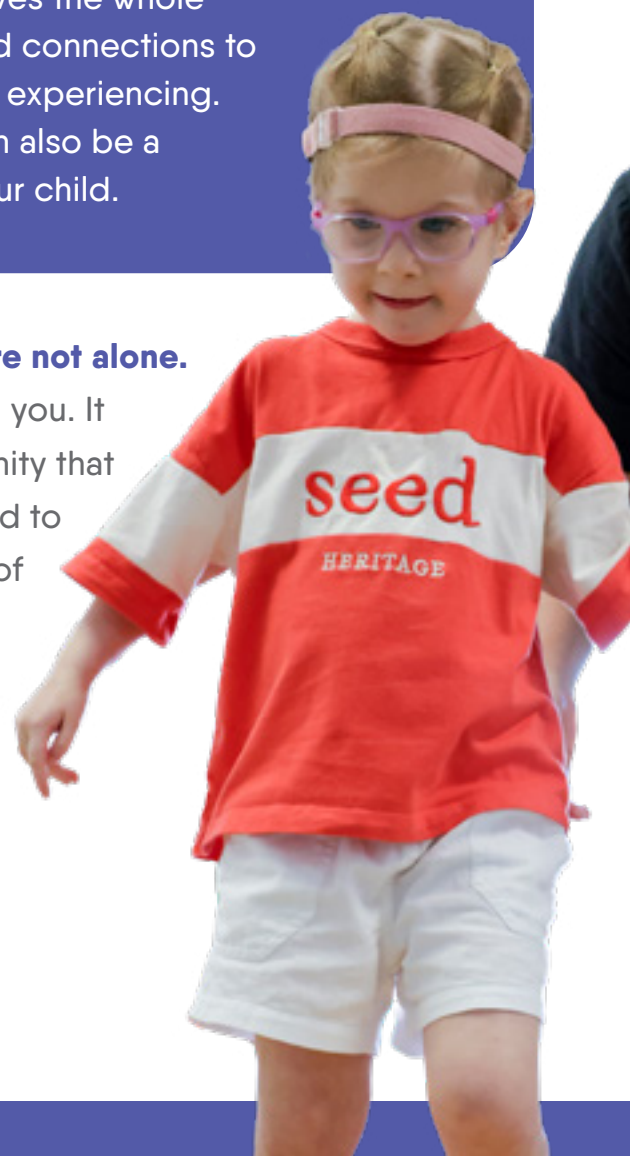
Motor Skills: Our therapists can support your child's physical development, from sitting up and crawling to holding a crayon.



Family Support: We know this journey involves the whole family. We provide resources, guidance, and connections to other parents who understand what you are experiencing. Connecting with deaf adults as mentors can also be a powerful way to see what is possible for your child.

Starting this journey can feel overwhelming, but you are not alone.

Early intervention provides a network of support around you. It connects you with specialists, resources, and a community that will walk alongside you. It's about empowering your child to grow into a confident, capable individual who is proud of who they are.



PART 2:

OUR SERVICES:

A TEAM AROUND YOU

Your child is unique, and so is their journey. At Deaf Connect, we offer a range of services designed to meet the individual needs of your child and support your whole family. Our team of dedicated professionals are specialists in working with deaf and hard of hearing children. More than that, they are passionate about helping your child discover their potential and thrive.

We work together with you, as partners in your child's development.

Whether in-person or online across Australia, we are here to walk alongside you, offering guidance, expertise, and a friendly face.

Our services are available for children from 0-8 years old, and we can often support school-aged children where we have the capacity.

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY: FINDING YOUR VOICE

Communication is about connection. Our Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) understand this deeply. They work with you and your child to build confidence and skills in communication, whatever form that takes. It's not just about sounds and words; it's about helping your child express their personality, share their ideas, and connect with the world around them.



In a fun and encouraging environment, our SLPs can help your child to:

- Develop their ability to communicate and express themselves.
- Build literacy skills for a future of learning.
- Explore different communication methods to find what works best for them.

We also offer support for deaf and hard of hearing adults with an NDIS plan who want to build their communication confidence and skills.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: THRIVING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Childhood is made of small, important moments: learning to hold a crayon, tying a shoelace, or joining in a game with friends. Our Occupational Therapists (OTs) are experienced in working with deaf and hard of hearing children and understand how your child's hearing affects their participation in everyday activities. They will work with your child to help them develop the skills they need to participate independently in daily life.

Our OTs work creatively with your child to:

- Develop play and social skills to build friendships.
- Improve fine motor skills for tasks like writing and dressing.
- Support self-care routines to build independence.
- Explore sensory processing to help them feel comfortable and engaged.
- Find the right aids, equipment or assistive technology to make life easier.



HERITAGE

PHYSIOTHERAPY: MOVING WITH CONFIDENCE

From taking their first steps to kicking a ball, movement is how children explore and learn about their world. Our Physiotherapists specialise in helping deaf and hard of hearing children develop their physical abilities. Balance and spatial awareness can sometimes be linked to hearing, and our Physiotherapists are experienced in providing targeted support for deaf and hard of hearing children.

They work with your child to:

- Improve balance, coordination, and core strength.
- Develop gross motor skills for running, jumping, and playing.
- Build physical confidence to explore their environment safely and joyfully.

PSYCHOLOGY: SUPPORTING WELLBEING FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Your family's emotional wellbeing is just as important as your child's development. Our Psychologists provide a safe and understanding space for parents, carers, and children to navigate the journey ahead. They can help with managing emotions, behaviour, and your unique parenting path. Our Psychologists are also skilled in supporting you through challenges that are unique to the deaf community, helping your family build resilience and connection. Deaf Connect is a registered NDIS provider and has private psychology appointments available in-person and through telehealth.





TEACHERS OF THE DEAF: GUIDING LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

Our Teachers of the Deaf (TODs) are specialists in early intervention for deaf and hard of hearing children. They understand the importance of early access to language for a child's development. A TOD can become a key partner for your family, guiding you through the early years.

They work closely with you to:

- Support your child's language acquisition, whether through Auslan, spoken language, or both.
- Develop strong communication skills for connection.
- Help you understand and manage hearing technology like cochlear implants.
- Introduce you to Deaf culture, providing a sense of identity and community.

SOCIAL WORK: YOUR ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT

Navigating systems and finding the right support can feel overwhelming. Our Social Workers are here to be your advocate. They support your family through life's transitions and challenges helping you build on your strengths.

Our Social Workers can:

- Help assess your family's needs and connect you to the right services.
- Provide support during times of change.
- Work to promote your child's social and emotional development.
- Empower your family to feel confident and resilient.

FAMILY MENTOR PROGRAM: CONNECTION AND CULTURE

Imagine having a guide who has walked a similar path. Our Family Mentor Program connects your family (with children aged 0-8) with a deaf mentor who is fluent in Auslan. Deaf mentors provide first-hand understanding of the deaf experience and Deaf culture. This is a unique opportunity for your child to see a proud, confident deaf adult role model, and for your whole family to learn about the deaf experience in a natural, supportive way.

The program focuses on building strong family bonds through shared language and understanding. To ensure your family gets the most from this experience, we ask for the whole family to be involved.

Chat to our team regarding the capacity of this program in your area.

AUSLAN FOR FAMILIES: LEARNING TOGETHER

Learning Auslan as a family is a powerful way to connect with your child and the Deaf community. We offer fun, practical ways for your family to learn together.

- **Auslan at Home:** Delivered by deaf tutors, this service provides a tailored Auslan learning program in your own home, online or face-to-face. It's perfect for fitting language learning into your busy family life. As well as learning the language, our deaf tutors will provide cultural awareness training (e.g. gaining attention, how to eat and sign at the dinner table) to ensure that you are able to create a positive and enriching language environment at home. These sessions can form part of your NDIS package, so enquire to book in.

- **Family Auslan Immersion Workshops:** Held during school holidays, these workshops are an exciting chance to dive into Auslan, meet other families with deaf children, and build your confidence and community in a fun, immersive setting.

AUSLAN FOR ADULTS: LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY

- **Introduction to Auslan:** We offer two levels of Introductory Beginner Auslan Courses open to all adults and available across Australia! These courses are delivered by experienced Deaf tutors with a focus on basic everyday vocabulary and communication signing skills and community interaction. Our Auslan courses are currently available online and face-to-face at Deaf Connect's offices at various locations around Australia. Please note our Introduction to Auslan classes are designed for independent learning and open to those 16 years and older.



PART 3: CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY



One of the most powerful things you can do is connect with other people who understand your journey.

The Deaf community is a strong, proud, and welcoming space for children and families.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION

Connecting with Deaf adults and other families can be incredibly valuable. Deaf adults can be powerful role models for your child, showing them what is possible. Other parents can offer practical advice, friendship, and understanding.

How to Get Involved:



Playgroups: Playgroups are a fun and informal way for you and your child to meet other families. They provide a supportive environment where children can play and parents can connect. We can help you find local playgroups.



Community Events: Deaf Connect hosts a variety of events throughout the year. These are great opportunities to practise your Auslan, meet new people, and experience Deaf culture.



Online Groups: There are many online forums and social media groups where you can connect with other parents from across Australia, ask questions, and share experiences.



Mentoring: We can connect your family with a deaf mentor. A deaf mentor can act as a guide and role model, sharing their experiences and providing valuable insight into life as a Deaf person.

PART 4:

PRACTICAL

INFORMATION

Navigating services and funding can feel overwhelming.

We are here to make it as simple as possible.

THE NDIS

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) gives eligible children, families and adults funding to access supports that help them meet their goals.

Deaf Connect is a registered NDIS provider, and we can support you in multiple ways through the scheme.

What we can help with:

1. NDIS Plan Management

We can manage your child's NDIS funding for you. This means:

- We help you keep track of budgets, invoices and claiming.
- You can access therapy and specialist supports without managing payments yourself.
- We act as a point of contact for service coordination.

Plan management gives families more support and less administrative stress.

2. Therapy and Allied Health Services

Where appropriate, your child's NDIS plan can fund services such as Speech Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Psychology and support from Teachers of the Deaf.

3. Support with Planning Pathways

If you're new to the NDIS or preparing for a planning meeting, we can:

- Help you understand eligibility and how the scheme works.
- Explain what outcomes and funding categories might look like.
- Suggest wording that aligns with your child's goals.

We aim to make the NDIS less confusing and more empowering.

A note on eligibility

Each family's NDIS journey is different. Eligibility and funding levels are assessed by the NDIS, not Deaf Connect. We will work with you to offer support and answer your questions throughout the process.



YOUR JOURNEY CONTINUES



Scan to visit
Deaf Connect

We hope this handbook has helped you feel a little more informed and a little less alone.

The best approach is the one that supports your child to access language, feel connected, and grow with confidence and pride.

Whenever you are ready, we are here to support you and walk alongside your family.

YOUR FEEDBACK

Your feedback helps us improve. We encourage you to share your thoughts, concerns, and compliments with us. We have a clear process for handling feedback and complaints.

**Submit your feedback
via our website today.**



Serving our community.
Sharing our culture.

CONTACT US

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU.

Whether you have a quick question or need more detailed support, please reach out.



1800 893 855



info@deafconnect.org.au



www.deafconnect.org.au

