

What is mild hearing loss?

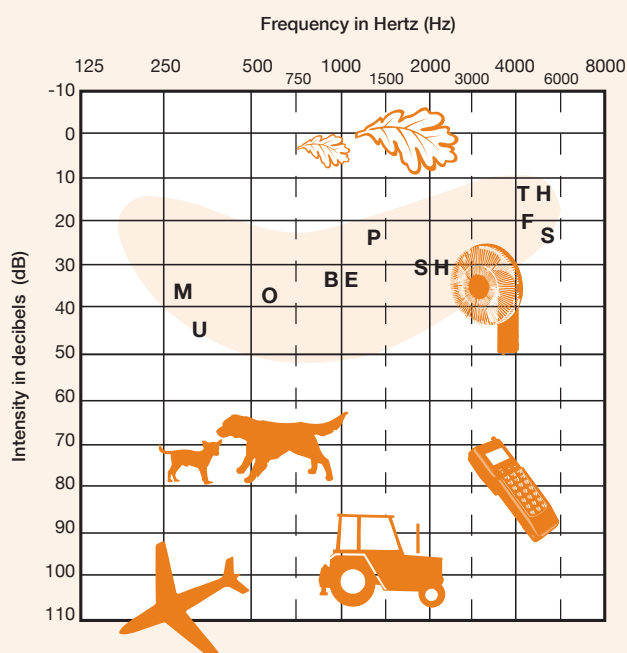


I have been told my child has a mild hearing loss.

What does this mean?

A mild hearing loss means that your child's hearing is slightly below the level that is considered normal. Your child's hearing specialist (audiologist) will be able to explain which sounds your child can hear and which sounds your child may have difficulty hearing.

The diagram below shows how your child hears low and high pitched sounds. A person with normal hearing can hear very soft sounds at 15 decibels or less. The speech sounds shown on the diagram have a loudness of about 20 to 40 decibels. A mild hearing loss can make it hard to hear soft speech sounds.



Why does my child have a hearing loss?

It is not always possible to determine the cause of a hearing loss. Your audiologist will be able to refer you to an otolaryngologist ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist or paediatrician who will help you explore the possible reasons for your child's hearing loss. Often it is hard to find the cause of hearing loss. In 50 to 60 percent of cases of permanent hearing loss in New Zealand no known cause is found.

How will having a mild hearing loss affect my child?

In young children, it can be difficult to tell that they have a mild hearing loss. While your child is likely to hear well in most environments, there may be a few situations in which your child may have more difficulty.

Children with a mild hearing loss may have difficulty:

- understanding speech in a noisy environment
- hearing quiet voices or soft sounds such as *s*, *t*, *th* and *f*.

Sometimes a mild hearing loss can affect speech development. Soft sounds like 's' are important for spoken English. If there is a concern about speech development, an assessment by a speech language therapist is recommended.

How can I help my child to hear?

A child with a mild hearing loss may have difficulty hearing when they are listening in a noisy environment. There are lots of ways you can help your child, for example:

- reduce background noise when possible – at home you can turn off TVs and radios when they are not in use, and close doors
- move away from noises when you want your child to hear you
- get your child's attention before you start talking
- make eye contact with your child when you are communicating – this will help hold your child's attention
- move closer to your child when talking so that your voice reaches your child's ears as clearly and loudly as possible. Within one metre is often thought of as a good distance.

Ear infections can cause a temporary deterioration in hearing, which may especially affect a child with mild hearing loss. Prompt attention from your family doctor when you suspect your child has an ear infection can limit this impact.

How can I talk to my child so that my words sound clearer?

The most important thing you can do is to continue to talk naturally to your child. The following visual strategies may also be helpful.

- Use facial expressions and natural gestures as they provide additional 'clues' to aid your child's understanding. You may want to use some New Zealand Sign language to support your child's understanding.
- Keep still when talking. This will help your child to see your lip patterns, facial expressions and gestures.

Will a hearing aid be helpful for my child?

Some children can benefit from wearing hearing aids and some may not. The decision about using a hearing aid or other technology can be reviewed as your child develops. The child's changing needs and typical listening environments are also important factors to the decision you make. Classrooms can be noisy, making it difficult for a child with mild hearing loss to hear speech clearly, so monitoring of hearing in the classroom is advised. The audiologist will be able to advise whether or not hearing aids are likely to be beneficial.

What will happen as my child grows up?

It is important that your child's hearing loss is recognised and supported. You can help important people learn how best to communicate with your child by advising them of strategies that improve hearing and understanding.

The audiologist should assess your child's hearing regularly in order to help build up a full description of the quietest sounds your child can hear at different pitches in each ear. In this way, any changes in your child's hearing will be picked up quickly. If you suspect your child's hearing has changed, contact your local audiology clinic.

If you have any concerns about your child's speech, language, communication and learning development please contact your audiologist, who may refer you to the Ministry of Education.

More information

The New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children (NZFDC) is an organisation which offers parent-to-parent support and advice to families and whānau of children with hearing loss.

Your child's audiologist can refer you or you can contact them directly by:

Freephone: 0800 DEAFCHILD (0800 332 324)

Text: 027 214 6901

Email: deafchildren@xtra.co.nz

Website: www.deafchildren.org.nz

For more information about children's hearing loss, and support available go to the:

- Ministry of Health website www.health.govt.nz
- Ministry of Education website www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/SpecialEducation/ServicesAndSupport/DeafAndHearingImpaired.aspx
- Ministry of Education resource *Getting Started* – available from www.minedu.govt.nz