

Hearing Impairments				
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INTRODUCTION In 2018 Wales introduced a new legislation known as the Additional Learning Needs Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, as suggested there should be more understanding for every individual who work with children, to help support them with their development, for example a child with a hearing impairment requires support such as sign language for them to communicate and develop (Welsh Government, 2018). According to the Welsh Government (2019, a) there are around two thousand six hundred and twenty-five children with a hearing impairment within Wales. Victory (2022) believes research suggests hearing loss in half the children diagnosed has been inherited from parents, others are born with it and some as they get older experience a deterioration through other causes. Furthermore, ASHA (1997-2023) states hearing loss in children can affect their developmental skills as it makes it difficult for them to understand what is being taught to them and verbally communicate as they struggle to hear and speak. Additionally, children’s mental health can be affected, as when children find it difficult to communicate it makes it harder for others to understand the child and for a child to understand others, therefore, making them feel undervalued and feel they are pushed aside and leaving them feel lonely (NHS Wales, No date. c.). IDENTIFICATION AND DIAGNOSTICS NHS (2021) states when a baby is four to five weeks old, they have a screening test called Automated otoacoustic emission test also known as AOAЕ, using small earpieces with sounds flowing through them, the screening equipment can detect ear responses. Although this is not entirely accurate due to a baby’s emotional state for example they are unsettled (British sign, No date). As a baby becomes older and reaches their early childhood education their hearing can deteriorate further, this could be due to undiagnosed hearing loss and a lack of early intervention, or this could be due to genetic functions; there is a large range of factors that can cause hearing loss (Healthy Children, 2021). Each possible cause of hearing loss would need to be identified to ensure the child has a positive quality of life and is provided with equitable learning opportunities (Welsh Government, 2019, b). NHS Wales (No date. a) suggests after a diagnosis is made, a child may be referred to Ears, Nose and Throat specialist (ENT) and/ or speech and language therapy also known as SALT, this can include additional agencies such as an educational psychologist depending on the child’s individual needs (NHS Wales, No date. b). CONCLUSION UNICEF (No date) Article 2 of the United Nations Conventions of the rights of a child (UNCRC) believes every child has the right to a quality of life whether they have a hearing impairment or they have any other additional learning needs, therefore, as stated within the Additional Learning Needs Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) everyone working with children with a hearing impairment should have the ability to understand and to support children with their education and their day-to-day life.				

STRATEGIES NHS Wales (No date. a) states if screening detects an issue with a baby’s hearing, it is recommended a baby be referred to an Ears, Nose and Throat specialist (ENT) to help find a diagnosis, such as glue ear which can be operated on to help fix the issues. ENT specialists may also provide children with hearing aids if the specialists believe it can help children with hearing and their speech and language. National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru (2019) agree with NHS (No date. a) hearing aids and important to some children depending on the severity of the child’s hearing impairment. However, the National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru (2019) states children with a hearing impairment can communicate with others in different way such as lip reading or sign language, although children struggle to communicate their learning abilities are not affected. Lip reading also known as speechreading is important to children at a young age, as in an ideal circumstance, about 30% to 40% of speech sounds are thought to be lip-readable, and most of the time, additional information is needed to fully comprehend what is being said (National Deaf Children’s Society, 2023). In addition, Sing and Sign (2023) sign language can be taught to babies at a young age through singing and sign, this can help ensure that as a baby gets older, they develop skills and can communicate with others. Furthermore, Speech and Language (2020) states a child’s confidence in their ability to communicate is also increased when they feel like they can understand what is being said to them and express themselves, which is supported by signing with them in their early years. Additionally, sign language abilities such as quickly learning, storing, and retrieving words are supported by signing with them. As stated by Early Years Matters (2023) observation within a child’s setting is important as this can identify any additional support can be given to a child as a hearing impairment can cause other underlining health issues to the child, such as speech and language and communication skills, this can also affect a child’s mental health. Therefore, in addition to the Additional Learning Needs Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, observing children can help practitioners identify and support children with a hearing impairment and any additional need they may need. According to RNID (No date) supporting practitioners, families and a child is important and can have a positive affect on everyone involved with the child as each individual learns how to support and communicate with the child who have a hearing impairment. BARRIERES AND CHALLENGES Previously, there were two methods to screening hearing loss in children, one method was infant distraction test screen at eight months, however, when reviewed in the 1990’s it was discovered that it was unreliable, and underperforming based on the current technology of that decade. Therefore, there was further research made to discover other ways of screening children for hearing loss/ impairment to ensure there was early identification. Research suggested early identification of hearing loss is valuable to preventing developmental delays are therefore since then, Dickinson (2018) explains a new implementation is every baby within Wales is screened for their hearing (AOAE) between four to five weeks old. However, this may not always work as a false positive can affect the results, therefore, this can affect children’s development in later life as there is no accurate result to help practitioners to know early on to prepare for any support a child may need. To overcome these children who are identified to having possible hearing loss are frequently screened through out their childhood. Additionally, Welsh Government (2021) states that children should be offered a school entry hearing screening tests from the age of 5, however this is not always possible as children can be absent from school therefore, the Welsh Government (2021) states two additional appointments be made for the child as it is important to their development. Statistically 6.7 million people in Britain could benefit from hearing aids, however only 2 million people use hearing aids. A reason for this could be caused by the negative stigma of hearing aids, lack of understanding of the benefits and how they look or being unable to afford hearing aids. Children frequently break hearing aids by accident, however, on the NHS if you break your hearing aid you either pay for a new one or you are placed on a waiting list (British Academy of Audiology, No date). National Deaf Children’s society (2023) states Lip – reading may not be sufficient for a child to develop effective communication skills, even though it can be a useful ability for children with hearing loss, as not all words or sounds can be understood by silent verbal communication. In places of education, it is more typical for sign language users to be a segregated minority. According to Unger, Wallach, and Jochems (2023) the largest obstacles for children is a general lack of understanding of hearing impairment concerns and a lack of sign language users in regular public places. There are not many professionals who can sign, which hinders their capacity to interact with and better comprehend the Deaf community. Additionally, it has negative effects on the services provided by the public and private sectors to children.
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