

Practical Guide

for support for students
with hearing impairments

during

COVID-19

Title

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS DURING COVID-19

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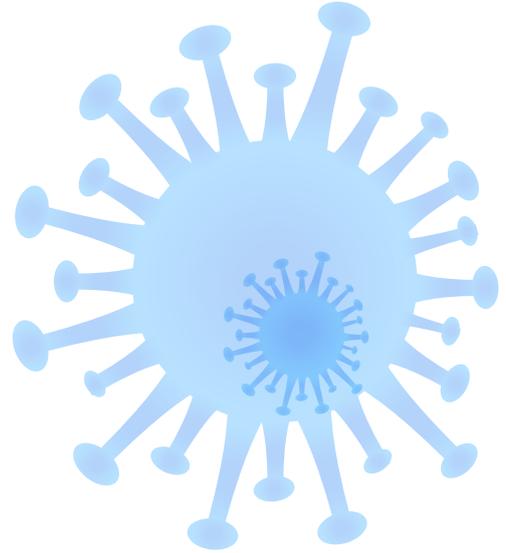
PRESENTATION

During this health pandemic that began in March 2020, and in the context of measures to prevent infection, the Spanish Confederation of Families of Deaf People (FIAPAS) detected a number of shortcomings in access to education for monitoring teaching and school activities that have impacted hearing-impaired students and their families.

To this end, the Associative Movement of Families – FIAPAS has indicated the need to foresee measures and formulas for action that are necessary for the auditory and communicative accessibility of deaf students who are severely affected during Covid-19 by social distancing measures, the use of masks, activities in larger spaces and/or outdoors or in spaces with screens, and the noise around them when doors and windows remain open, without the availability of hearing and technological support products. And by the lack of accessibility in online teaching.

We also want to highlight the fact that the inequality gap that arose during the previous 19/20 school year due to the sudden arrival of remote education (neither planned nor resolved under equal conditions for deaf students), and the social support required for situations of social-family vulnerability demand the provision of educational and specific support to be adopted and integrated in subsequent years, not only for the duration of the pandemic but also once it has ended, as much of what has now been experienced will remain, demanding not only a new perspective but a new way of acting aimed at compensating for educational shortfalls and limitations at academic and training level, caused by both the interruption in support aimed at the (re-)habilitation of language and/or educational support and the lack of accessibility to online classes, content and materials.

This situation has also provided the opportunity to take stock of an immediate future in which the Education Authorities are committed to prioritising classroom learning, yet without ruling out two other scenarios: blended and distance learning.



Whatever the case, the challenges faced by the education of these students must consider these different scenarios, taking into account the diversity between students with hearing disabilities, their personal situation, their needs, their social-family situation, etc., in addition to the heterogeneity in the circumstances of the educational environment itself and in relation to the resources available in each case. This is done to better plan the resources needed to meet these needs in the variable nature of situations of interaction in teaching/learning environments and the different types of activities in which these students participate.

The educational challenge facing us must take into account various areas of intervention, which have already been highlighted from different levels: the development of skills by students ultimately aimed at the basic skill of *Learning to Learn*; access to digital skills and new technologies, from design and universal accessibility applied to the supports and to the teaching methodologies and materials, and to teacher training; the development and encouragement of positive attitudes in students towards learning and the Knowledge Society; and the well-being of students, encouraging their inclusion and participation and avoiding situations of rejection or harassment, whether in a face-to-face or online environment.

The aim of this Guide is to provide education policy-makers in the various public authorities, educational care professionals, and students themselves and their families with practical information that can be applied on a daily basis to help compensate for shortfalls and respond to the needs identified. It proposes measures that can help mitigate them and provides guidance for access to information, communication and learning during this pandemic, which has had a particular impact on education.

Carmen Jáudenes Casaubón
Director of FIAPAS



CHILD ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY-FIAPAS

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS SHARE THEIR OWN REFLECTIVE GUIDE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



1 ONLINE OR IN PERSON, WE HAVE THE SAME RIGHT TO LEARN AS ANYONE ELSE

2 WITHOUT TEACHERS AND SPEECH THERAPISTS, QUALITY EDUCATION IS NOT POSSIBLE



3 WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE FM AND MAGNETIC LOOP SYSTEMS TO
HEAR THE TEACHER AND OUR CLASSMATES



4 WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE: KEEPING THE TURNS TO SPEAK AND
SPEAKING CLEARLY AND VOCALISING FACILITATES COMMUNICATION



5 WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH SUBTITLED VIDEOS
AND CLASSES



6 WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ACCESSIBLE PLATFORMS AND TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORTS

7 WE ALL HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS OURSELVES



8 NO ONE SHOULD BE ALONE OR FEEL EXCLUDED OR REJECTED



9 EDUCATION OPENS ONE'S EARS TO THE WORLD AND IS THE PATH TO FREEDOM



10 THANKS TO EDUCATION, I CAN BE WHAT I WANT TO BE



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FOR EQUAL EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITIES



SITUATION DIAGNOSIS AND PROPOSALS REGARDING STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

Because the closure of schools has led to a great many difficulties and limitations in learning opportunities for students with hearing impairments (many of which are due to the suspension or reduction of the individual support provided in each case and/or the lack of accessibility in online education), we offer, in short, the diagnosis of the shortcomings detected and a series of proposals and recommendations to prevent new inequality gaps in line with three possible scenarios: face-to-face, blended and distance learning.

ORGANISATIONAL AND METHODOLOGICAL SHORTCOMINGS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

- ✓ There have been no daily classes. There are unfinished subjects and unfinished curriculums.
- ✓ There were no consultation spaces with the teacher; there was no feedback on the activities completed.
- ✓ Access to support products commonly used in schools was not provided.
- ✓ Inaccessible assessment processes and tests.
- ✓ There have been no accessible and agile channels for contact with the school, tutors and/or teachers.
- ✓ No clear, timely information was received from schools or the education authorities.
- ✓ No difficulties and/or shortcomings were resolved.
- ✓ Excess burden on families.

PROPOSALS (according to possible scenarios)

Classroom Learning

- Overall assessment of the students' situation: emotional, skills, learning and level of knowledge acquired in relation to what was expected.
- Provision for educational and specific support to compensate for the training shortfalls or limitations that have existed during and at the end of the 19/20 year.
- Ensure the availability of hearing and technological support products both in classrooms and in activities in larger spaces and/or outdoors, or spaces with screens.
- Establish a protocol of hygiene measures required in relation to the use of hearing aids and support products used in the educational setting.
- Timely information to families on the assessment, the provisions for support, and any incident affecting the following of the course.
- Transfer of clear, constant information on safety, hygiene and preventive measures to students and families.
- Development of a plan to prevent unwanted situations, to deal with any possible scenarios, including: curricula and materials invented and designed to adapt to online teaching, remote assessment criteria, channels of communication with families, pool for the loan of telematic devices and support products, training for students on online learning and the use of technologies, training in personal strategies and in the use of technologies for families.

Blended and Distance Learning

- Prioritising classroom learning, provided the family agrees, in the case of students with hearing impairments as opposed to other classmates without an impairment, because of the uniqueness in access to information, communication and learning which, in any case, is more favourable in face-to-face situations due to the ease of use of support products in these circumstances, the continuity of personal support, and the promotion of interaction with classmates.
- Assessment of the learning situation and level of skills to be achieved, as well as the resources available.
- Provision for educational and specific support to compensate for the training shortfalls or limitations that have existed during and at the end of the 19/20 year.
- Continuity of curriculum adaptations (content and/or materials).
- Hearing support products that provide access to information, communication and learning (individual magnetic induction or FM systems, or with connectivity via home telematics supports), in the same way as they are used in the classroom.
- Creation of an accessible, agile communications channel between the tutor, teachers (including support teachers), and students and families.
- Monitoring and assessment processes accessible and consistent with the curriculum adaptations adopted, if applicable.
- Plan virtual, formal and informal meetings with classmates and school mates.
- Transfer of clear, constant information on safety, hygiene and preventive measures to students and families.

ABSENCE OF PERSONAL SUPPORT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

- ✓ Cessation or reduction of:
 - ✓ Educational support: school support and speech therapy.
 - ✓ Non-teaching support: sign language interpreters.

PROPOSALS (according to possible scenarios)

Classroom Learning

- Continuation of educational and speech therapy support.
- Immediate substitution of teachers in the event of absence.
- Creation of a pool of teachers and professionals for substitute and back-up staff.

Blended and distance learning

- Continuation of educational and speech therapy support.
- Rapid substitution of teachers in the event of absence.
- Involvement of sign language interpreters for students familiar with sign language.
- Creation of a pool of teachers and professionals for substitute and back-up staff, as well as taking support to the home, if applicable.

LACK OF ACCESSIBILITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

- ✓ Lack of:
 - ✓ Accessible devices.
 - ✓ Accessible content.
 - ✓ Audiovisual accessibility.
 - ✓ Internet connection.
- ✓ Lack of accessibility in:
 - ✓ The receipt of instructions and instructions to perform tasks.
 - ✓ Assessment processes.
 - ✓ Educational programmes on television.

PROPOSALS (according to possible scenarios)

Classroom Learning

- Teacher training in the design of accessible materials and in the use of new technologies, including accessibility in teaching/learning and assessment processes and in educational practice.
- Development of a plan to prevent unwanted situations, to deal with any possible scenarios, including: curricula and materials invented and designed to adapt to online teaching, remote assessment criteria, channels of communication with families, pool for the loan of telematic devices and support products, training for students on online learning and the use of technologies, training in personal strategies and in the use of technologies for families, etc.

Blended and distance learning

- Teacher training in the design of accessible materials and in the use of new technologies, including accessibility in teaching/learning and assessment processes and in educational practice.
- Subtitling of online classes.
- Written instructions and guidelines to perform tasks, activities, etc.
- Projection of subtitled audiovisuals and/or photographs, images or presentations with text or with subtitles if accompanied by audio.
- Contact and collaboration with the Associative Movement of Families of Deaf People-FIAPAS.

SOCIAL-FAMILY VULNERABILITY

- ✓ Lack of:
 - ✓ Electronic devices.
 - ✓ Internet connection.
- ✓ Need for increased support through grants and financial support.

PROPOSALS (all scenarios)

- Create a fund of financial aid to strengthen the support required in situations of social-family vulnerability, aimed at:
 - Intensifying school and speech therapy support to compensate for the gap caused by the shortage or reduction of these services, as well as the inaccessibility of distance learning during the 19/20 year.
 - Purchasing support products necessary at home to enable access to distance learning on equal terms.
- Create a device loan pool.
- Training in personal strategies and the use of technology, aimed at families in various educational settings.

OTHER

- ✓ Lack of information and guidance to families.
- ✓ Lack of information on a support plan for students who have not obtained the skills of the year that has ended, even if they have gone on to the next year.

PROPOSALS (all scenarios)

- Creation of an (accessible) communications channel with families and students to provide timely information on the school situation due to current circumstances, and any changes of interest to the student and his/her family. Through which, in turn, families can receive specific guidance and express and consult their doubts, especially in the situation of Blended and Distance Learning.

Measures to address with classroom learning the inequality gap opened with Distance Learning

In prioritising the return to classroom learning, it should be noted that, due to the closure of schools during the pandemic, the inequality gap opened with distance learning also requires the planning of educational and specific support to be adopted as of the start of the school year in order to compensate for the educational shortfalls and limitations caused by the pandemic.



Shortfalls due to the interruption in support aimed at the (re)habilitation of language and/or educational support, and the lack of accessibility to online classes, content and materials .



Provisions regarding Classroom or Distance Learning

- Continuity, in distance learning, of the educational and speech therapy support that each case established for education by the school.
- Incorporating accessibility into teaching/learning processes, materials and assessment processes through:
 - subtitling of online classes.
 - written instructions and guidelines to perform tasks, activities, etc.
 - continuity of curriculum adaptations (content and/or materials).
 - hearing support products that provide access to information, communication and learning (individual magnetic induction or FM systems, or with connectivity via home telematics supports), in the same way as they are used in the classroom.
 - projection of subtitled audiovisuals and/or photographs, images or presentations with text or with subtitles if accompanied by audio.
 - involvement of sign language interpreters for students familiar with sign language.
 - monitoring and assessment processes accessible and consistent with the curriculum adaptations adopted, if applicable.
 - timely information on the school situation due to current circumstances, and any other changes of interest to the student and his/her family.
 - teacher training in the development of skills related to the design of accessible materials, with the incorporation of accessibility into teaching/learning and assessment processes and in educational practice.



GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Hygiene and prevention measures against infection

In addition to the virus prevention measures generally planned for all students, aimed at returning to classroom learning, the measures and forms of action necessary must be anticipated for the auditory and communicative accessibility of deaf students, severely affected during Covid-19 due to:

- Social distancing measures.
- The use of masks.
- Activities in larger and/or outdoor spaces or spaces with screens without hearing and technological support products, which are usually applied in classrooms.
- The noise of the surroundings, with windows and doors remaining open.
- The omission of necessary hygiene measures in relation to the use of hearing aids themselves and the support products used in the educational setting.



Measures to compensate for situations of Social-Family Vulnerability

The support required for situations of social-family vulnerability must be reinforced with financial aid through the specific benefits, including:

- The purchase of support products necessary at home to enable access to distance learning on equal terms.
- Intensifying school and speech therapy support to compensate for the gap caused by the shortage or reduction of these services, as well as the inaccessibility of distance learning.



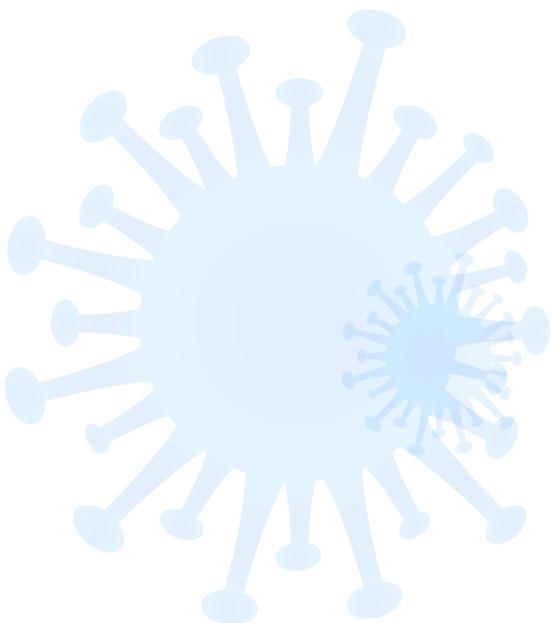
INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

Accessible Technology, combined with support products, improves digital culture, broadening the horizon of learning and personal development in all types of environment (education, work, socio-cultural, etc.), encouraging and motivating participation and providing equal opportunities.

Accessibility in virtual environments is a right of the hearing impaired.

Therefore, the application and use of technologies in distance learning, video conferences, etc. should not create new barriers but new opportunities for learning, participation and interaction.

- In these new situations of virtual meetings and interaction, the students themselves and their families must be offered training in the development of personal strategies and in the use of technologies, devices, etc.
- It will also be necessary to adopt measures for the prevention and prompt identification of situations of rejection and cyber-bullying, including training activities aimed at teachers, students and families.



CERTAIN ACCESSIBILITY MEASURES

Classes, video conferences and virtual meetings

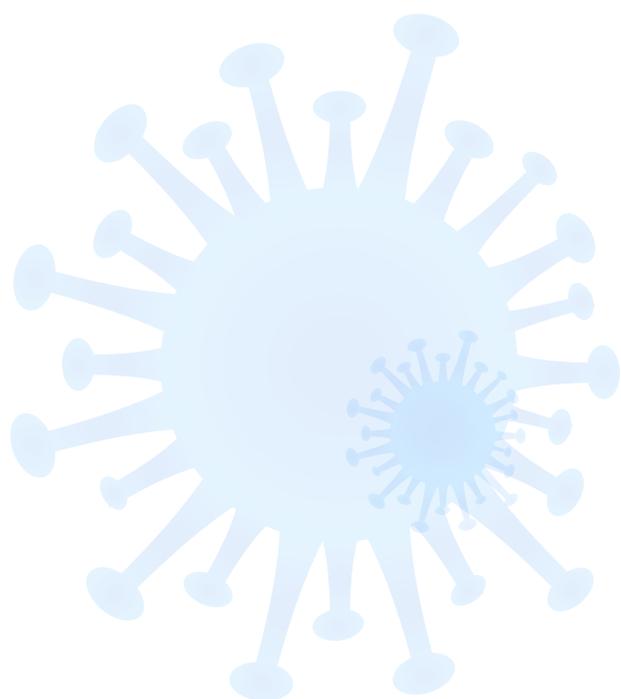
- Present the audience beforehand, allowing time for the deaf person to ensure that his/her listening situation is correct and, if not, that he/she can make the necessary adjustments to his/her hearing aids and/or the support products he/she is using in connection with the device.
- Always connect by video, as the possibility of seeing the speaker's face supports communication.
- Check the lighting, as it is always better for the light to be facing the speaker's face and never from behind. The backlit location prevents the person speaking from being seen.
- Always keep your mouth visible to support lip reading, without covering it with your hands or other objects.
- Project your voice when speaking so that it is correctly picked up by the microphone of the device used.
- Respect the turn for speaking and mute the microphone of the other participants when one of the attendees is speaking, allowing for the person involved on each occasion to be clearly identified and for improved listening.
- Avoid noise in the environment where each participant is located and connected.
- Involvement of sign language interpreters for students familiar with sign language.
- Share the screen whenever documents, images, videos, etc. are shown.
- Project the subtitled audiovisuals.
- If photographs, images or presentations are shown, accompany them with text and, if they are shown using audio or videos, always subtitled.
- Use the chat box for clarifications, comments, etc. and, in particular, for any questions to be answered and/or for which proof is required that the subject is familiar to all participants.
- Record, wherever possible, the class, video conference or video meeting so that it can be viewed later. (Attendees must indicate their agreement to the recording, in compliance with Law 3/2018 on the Protection of Personal Data and guarantee of digital rights)
- Use platforms that allow for real-time subtitling, with the possibility of recording and filing. The use of systems is recommended that minimise errors in transcription and the absence of punctuation marks, which make the texts incomprehensible.



EMERGING BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING

The generalisation and mandatory protective measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (masks, screens and social distancing) have highlighted the barriers in access to information and communication faced by deaf people in their surroundings and in any circumstance, and which have been exacerbated by the incorporation of these preventive measures if they are not supplemented with other types of resource, such as the installation of hearing accessibility support products, raising awareness on how to speak to a deaf person, or the involvement of a sign language interpreter in the case of deaf people who are familiar with this language.

These measures therefore emerge as new barriers in the environment and in the life of deaf people, particularly in the case of those wearing hearing aids (hearing aids and/or implants) and who communicate in oral language, because not only lip reading but also hearing information provided by their prostheses are basic supports for communication and access to information.



MASKS, SCREENS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

The use of masks¹ not only impedes lip reading and detracts from the communicative facial expression but it also has an impact on **perceived sound quality**, as masks dampen **the reception volume of the spoken message** and hinder **speech intelligibility**. Added to this is the reduction caused by social distancing from the speaker and/or the barrier imposed by screens. These difficulties increase the greater the ambient noise contamination in the environment where the interaction is taking place.

With regard to masks, different studies have been conducted to show how they affect speech perception, reducing the intensity with which it is heard and affecting intelligibility. Therefore, the quality of listening is seriously impaired, especially **in particularly noisy environments with acoustic conditions that are not always adequate, such as classrooms and, in general, all spaces in schools**. This harmful situation for every deaf person, which in any case puts them at a clear disadvantage and inequality with regard to all other students, must be avoided and solved using the resources provided by technology. Particular attention must be drawn to children who are developing language and acquiring basic instrumental tools for learning, such as literacy, as the harm caused by this situation may be irreversible due to the sensitivity of their critical period of development.

Moreover, it should also be noted that the placement of the rubber bands or tapes of the masks around the ears can also lead to unforeseen falls and losses of the hearing prostheses, if “ear guards” are not used to adjust the mask at the back of the head, and they also affect the perceived intensity or sound of the language by bending the ear slightly and pressing on the prostheses.

With regard to the installation of screens, they must be accompanied by the installation of magnetic loops, facilitating direct communication with the person on the other side of the screen.

In general, screens should meet certain requirements in their installation, materials and maintenance, such as being completely transparent, without any decorative elements or obstacles that limit, even minimally or partially, the full visibility of the person on the other side of the screen. In addition, as support for communication and lip reading, the material used must be of the utmost transparency that does not deform the image, and it must not be possible to scratch it or for it to become opaque over time.

Hearing and communication support products to overcome barriers

In this new situation in schools, along with the relevant communication strategies, the use of hearing support products such as **the magnetic loop or FM systems**, which dampen ambient noise and bring the voice of the speaker or audio source directly closer to the deaf person through their hearing aids, is even more essential.

Furthermore, the incorporation into virtual teaching/learning environments has highlighted the need to use not only **accessible technology platforms** for contact with the tutor and teachers, but the **messages and content** conveyed, as well as the **teaching materials**, must also be accessible in the form of **texts and/or with subtitles**.

Subtitling must also be included in all **audiovisual materials** used to teach classes and in **any virtual environment** generated: video conferences and online spaces for formal and informal meetings with classmates and school mates.

¹ As of the time of going to print, the Order of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs has not been published, which will establish the information and marketing requirements for face masks, including transparent face masks.

In addition to the general measures that all schools and school services must implement for the prevention of infection, in line with the standards issued by the Health and Education Authorities, in the case of students with hearing impairments hygiene and cleaning measures must also be observed in relation to hearing support products that are worn individually, including hearing aids.

Therefore, before and after handling of any of these products, whether to clean them, to replace the batteries, or to fit them correctly, the person performing these tasks must:

- Wash and dry their hands thoroughly, even if disposable gloves are to be worn, before and after handling and/or cleaning prostheses or any other support product. Disposable gloves should be discarded after each use.
- For handling and/or cleaning, place the prostheses or support product in question on a safe, preferably soft surface to avoid marks or scratches and prevent them from being dropped, as this could damage them.
- Always rule out the use of products containing alcohol, bleach, window cleaner, or similar. Do not use sanitiser gel. Also avoid using scourers because they cause scratching. Do not use toilet paper or kitchen paper, as this leaves debris on the equipment and may render it unusable.
- Do not spray or dampen the device, prosthesis or other support product directly with disinfectant.
- Always observe the handling, cleaning and safety instructions given by the product manufacturer.
- Prostheses should be cleaned daily when fitted and removed. Support products, such as FM Systems or Magnetic Loops, should be cleaned after each use.
- Devices and batteries must be stored in their case, which will also have been previously disinfected, until they are next required.



OF SUPPORT PRODUCTS

Specific measures for individual FM systems and magnetic loops

- Devices must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each use, identifying the person to handle and use them at any given time.
- Before cleaning, remove the batteries from the transmitter and receiver compartments.
- Alcohol-free disinfectant wipes are generally recommended for cleaning. Do not use scented wet wipes or similar.
- Use a clean, dry cloth to immediately remove any moisture left on the equipment, as this may damage or render it unusable.
- To reach less accessible corners, the use of small soft brushes is advised. Do not use cotton buds, as they leave debris that damages the equipment.

Microphones

- The microphone is the part closest to the mouth and, therefore, highly exposed to contamination. Therefore, it should be protected with cling film, which will be removed after each individual use before protecting the microphone again the next time it is used.
- The microphone must be cleaned separately once the cling film has been removed. Due to the sensitivity of its components to moisture, the microphone housing, clip, and grille should be carefully cleaned and dried immediately so that moisture does not penetrate it. Do not spray directly with any product.



HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH A DEAF PERSON

General guidelines to support communications in any environment

THE USE OF MASKS, SOCIAL DISTANCING, AND THE INSTALLATION OF SCREENS AFFECTS LISTENING AND IMPEDES SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY IN ANY ENVIRONMENT.

In the light of the measures to prevent Covid-19 and in order to promote inclusive and accessible environments for deaf people, some simple guidelines must be known that facilitate and support communication.

Faced with these new communication barriers, it is also necessary to adapt public spaces with support products for hearing accessibility, such as the magnetic loop.

The magnetic loop is a support product that allows direct communication with deaf people wearing hearing prostheses (hearing aids and implants), reducing ambient noise and bringing sound and voice closer.



WHEN SPEAKING...



NEVER SPEAK IF HE/SHE IS NOT LOOKING AT YOU.

FACE HIM/HER WHEN SPEAKING AND MAKE SURE YOUR FACE IS CORRECTLY LIT.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE AT THE SAME HEIGHT AS HIM/HER, ESPECIALLY IF THE PERSON IS SITTING OR IS A CHILD.

SPEAK NATURALLY. VOCALISE CORRECTLY, BUT WITHOUT EXAGGERATING THE WAY YOU SPEAK. DO NOT TALK QUICKLY, OR TOO SLOWLY.

SPEAK IN A NORMAL TONE OF VOICE, WHICH IS AUDIBLE IF YOU ARE IN A NOISY ENVIRONMENT, BUT WITHOUT SHOUTING.

USES SIMPLE SENTENCES. DO NOT SPEAK IN SINGLE WORDS OR IN BROKEN SENTENCES. USES A COMMON VOCABULARY.

IF YOU ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD, REPEAT YOUR MESSAGE. YOU CAN CHANGE A WORD FOR A SIMPLER ONE, BUT ALWAYS REPEAT THE FULL SENTENCE AND CONTEXTUALISE THE MESSAGE

AND ALSO...

- RESPECT TURNS WHEN SPEAKING.
- INDICATE WHO IS SPEAKING AT ANY GIVEN TIME.
- MAKE SIMPLE, NATURAL GESTURES TO HELP UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OR WRITE IT DOWN.
- TAKE TIME TO ENSURE THE MESSAGE HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD.

WHEN YOU TALK TO YOUR DEAF CHILDREN

In a situation like the one caused by the Covid-19 pandemic or in any other circumstance of a social and health emergency or family concern, when you talk to your children, especially if they are young, bear in mind that not only your words or the expression of your love and protection for them but also your attitude (even when you think they are not watching you) is very important for their emotional well-being. And this is the mirror they are looking at, discovering how to deal with the ups and downs of life.

AND WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT COVID-19...



01

Provide information in a clear and age-appropriate manner, without unnecessary alarm.
Make sure they have understood what has been said.

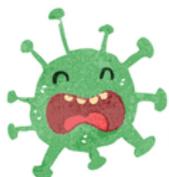
02

Take time to answer their questions.
Filter or avoid information in the media and social networks that may concern them.



03

Repeat protective and preventive measures together, as if it were a game.
Imitation and play are two basic instruments for learning



04

Create a safe climate at home.
Try not to alarm them if a family member becomes infected.



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The list provided presents the Federations and Confederate Associations in FIAPAS as of December 2020. (For the most up-to-date contact details: www.fiapas.es)

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