



Coaches' Guide for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Athletes



Learn About Your D/HH Athlete's Hearing Loss

- Learn about the athlete's level of hearing loss and if they use any assistive hearing devices.
- **Determine the child's communication preferences: spoken language, American Sign Language, combination of both, etc.**
- Learn how to use the child's FM System (microphone voice transmission directly to the hearing device being worn) if one is used.



Understand the Challenges

- Background noise, reverberation, and distance between the athlete and the speaker can greatly increase a D/HH child's ability to understand sound.
- **Noisy gyms, open fields, and outdoor spaces can severely limit an athlete's ability to hear coaches, teammates, and officials.**
- If an athlete uses hearing devices to listen, they may tire more quickly due to "auditory fatigue."
- **D/HH athletes often miss out on "incidental learning" which is learning that occurs as a result of casually overhearing everyday conversations.**
- D/HH children may not always express their inability to hear you. They also may not be aware that they misunderstood or missed a direction entirely.



How Can Coaches Level the Playing Field for D/HH Athletes?

Many D/HH athletes rely on lip-reading and facial cues to fill in gaps when part of a message is missed.

To help increase understanding and visual access to information and cues, please remember to:

- Deliver verbal instructions in close proximity to the D/HH athlete, making sure to face them.
- **Make eye contact and await confirmation that the athlete knows you are about to share verbal information.**
- Avoid having your back to the sun or bright light when delivering verbal information as this can make lip-reading and ASL communication difficult.
- **If using an ASL interpreter, make sure they are positioned next to you, facing the athlete.**
- Avoid giving instructions *while* demonstrating a new skill. Instead, explain the skills in close proximity, and then demonstrate. After, check and confirm understanding.



When coaches lead by example and prioritize inclusion strategies for D/HH athletes, teammates will value and use the same strategies which can create a positive team dynamic.

Practices That Lead to Success

- **Use visual timers and signals to aid the D/HH athlete in keeping up with game play.**
- Signals can be created with the athlete and should be taught to the entire team to foster communication.
- **Consider assigning a “hearing buddy” in close proximity who can alert the athlete to changes in play or communication from coaches and referees.**
- Give performance feedback in a quiet setting.
- **Consider providing the practice, drill, or game plan information in writing in advance to allow the child to ask questions and get a sense of expectations.**
- Set the expectation that teammates utilize and practice inclusion strategies.



Practices to Avoid

- Avoid lowering participation expectations due to the athlete’s hearing loss.
- **Saying “nevermind” or “I’ll tell you later” to a D/HH person after they have communicated they did not hear you can feel hurtful and promote isolation. Coaches and teammates should not tolerate annoyed behavior directed at D/HH individuals.**
- Comprehension of visual signals can be impacted by distance and body placement if you are too far or facing away from the athlete.
- **If a D/HH athlete doesn’t appear to be following directions or executing a skill correctly after instruction, check for a communication breakdown first before assuming lower skill level.**



References

Osborn, C. (2016). Coaches Resource Guide: Supporting Young Athletes Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in a Mainstream Setting. In

https://coach.ca/sites/default/files/archive/2020-02/Coaches_Resource_Guide.pdf (pp. 1–32).

Palmer, C. V., Butts, S. L., Lindley IV, G. A., & Snyder, S. E. (1996). Time Out! I Didn’t Hear You (pp. 1–90). Sports Support Syndicate, Inc.

<https://sites.pitt.edu/~cvp/timeout.pdf>



Technology.



- If using an FM system or other personal amplification device with the D/HH athlete, inform any game officials and the other team that you are doing so to avoid any misunderstandings about the intention of the assistive equipment.
- **If presenting information in a group setting, consider using a computerized notetaking app or program to record and summarize verbal information. Computerized notetaking can benefit all athletes on the team, including multilingual learners.**