

## **ASDC/Endeavor/Summer 2009**

### **Making Mainstream Classrooms Deaf Friendly**

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Have you ever wondered how your child's classroom environment affects the ability to be a part of classroom discussions? When students do not have full access to information, they can easily fall behind. Whether children use an oral approach or utilize a sign language interpreter, they are faced with challenging situations. Speedy lectures, flashing powerpoint slides, reading along from books, looking at a computer while the teacher is simultaneously speaking, group discussions, multiple dialogues, epic stories requiring lengthy periods of concentration – each and all result from time to time in mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion.

The inability to follow the discussions in the classroom do significantly impact academic achievement and social and emotional well-being. Simply stated, the simple processes of attending to multiple stimulations occurring in the classroom require concentrated effort and focused attention. Is it any wonder that many of our children arrive home exhausted and unwilling, or unable, to focus on homework?

As parents and caregivers, it is important to be aware and take note of each classroom your child is in during their day. How are the rooms set up? Have the teachers and principle had training on the unique needs of the deaf child so that the classroom is equally as accessible to him/her as it is to everyone else?

Here are some simple tips:

1. Take a day or two and visit your child's classroom/rooms at the beginning of the school year.
2. Take notes on the seating arrangement. Is your child seated in a place where everyone is visible? Many times, deaf friendly classrooms are arranged in a circle. But sometimes, they're set up in rows. Frequently deaf children will be asked to sit in the front. You and your child need to decide if this is the optimal situation; perhaps a seat over by the side or a couple of rows back is more convenient and comfortable for your child.
3. Are there any distracting acoustics that can be eliminated?
4. Have there been communication rules set up that allow for your child to know who is talking? Simple rules such as raising the hand to speak first,

turn-taking, pointing to the speaker, and talking while facing the group will eliminate the guesswork.

5. Has everyone in the classroom been trained on how to use an interpreter or how to communicate with deaf children?
6. Has the teacher been trained on time lags in interpreting, as well as delays between viewing the computer, a book, or a powerpoint, and eye contact with the deaf child prior to moving into ensuing discussion?
7. In group discussions or projects, has additional time been allowed to accomplish the task where such is warranted?
8. Does the teacher use the black/white board to list key information that helps both the interpreter and deaf student follow the discussion?
9. Is there a visual alerting system in the classroom?
10. Is media captioned?

Simple training at the beginning of the year and throughout the year makes a difference in your child's success at school. Awareness and sensitivity training are on-going. While schools have obligations to meet the needs of your child, reminders from time to time as well as the recognition of differences – whether subtle or significant – keep everyone involved communicating openly.

By being aware of your child's needs, knowing how to work with your child's teachers and school, and involving your child in significant decision making results in meeting accessibility standards. In addition, modeling advocacy helps your child learn to advocate appropriately for themselves as well as builds awareness of the significance of accessibility for all children.