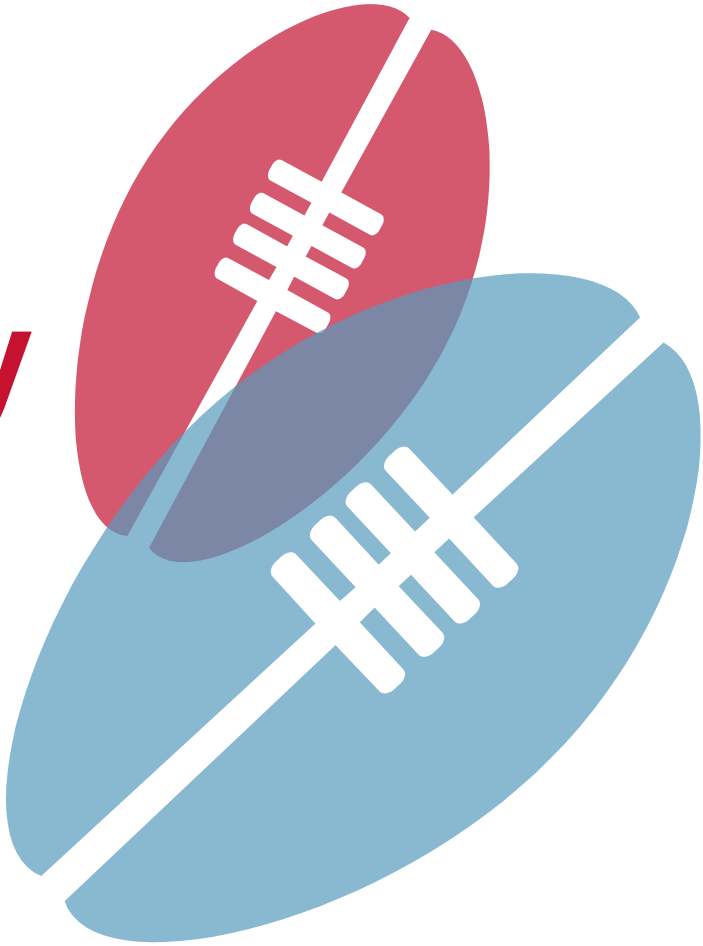
A guide to

deaf-friendly rugby union



RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION DEAF

Supported by

cwdc

Children's Workforce Development Council

ndcs

every deaf child

Our vision is of a world without barriers for every deaf child.

Foreword

"Rugby union is one of the nation's most popular team sports.

The Rugby Football Union is committed to delivering the opportunity to play the sport to everyone, regardless of age, race, ability, gender or sexual orientation. Everybody who wishes to take part – whether as a player, coach, referee or other volunteer – should be given the opportunity to reach their potential. We believe that rugby, with its core values of respect, discipline, enjoyment, sportsmanship and teamwork, is a game that everyone can play.

To this end, I welcome the development of this guidance document for all involved in rugby union. It provides vital information for players, parents, coaches and administrators in ensuring that children and adults with any level of deafness have a positive experience of the sport."

Nic Scott
Equity & Inclusion Manager
Rugby Football Union

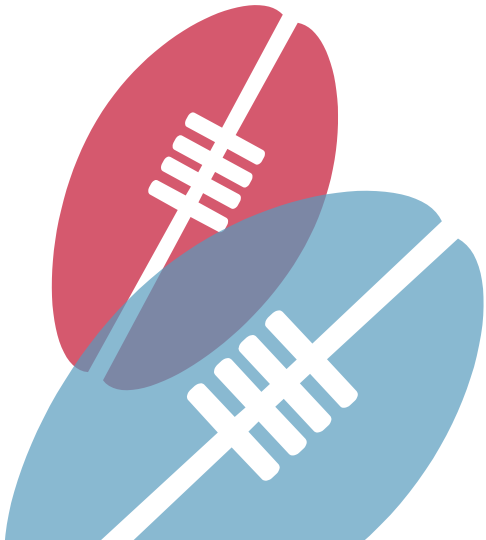
Contents

NDCS, Rugby Football Union and England Deaf Rugby Union would like to thank the following for their help in the preparation of this guide:

The Football Association

The Football Foundation

International Rugby Board (IRB)



Introduction

Welcome to this, the first ever guidance for supporting deaf people in the sport of rugby union.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide anyone involved in the sport with support, ideas and guidance on how to include deaf people in rugby union.

The document has been designed primarily for those working with young deaf people; however, many of the points and advice given are equally applicable for use with all ages and roles with any level of the sport.

By the end of the guidance the reader should be able to:

- apply their extended knowledge to meet the needs of deaf participants
- feel more confident when coaching deaf players
- have improved their awareness of deafness and provide better understanding of the needs of deaf participants
- use basic communication skills for coaching deaf players
- use basic British Sign Language signs appropriate to the sport of rugby union
- identify appropriate safety and medical considerations
- plan a range of coaching sessions that include deaf players
- understand how to include deaf players in a match situation
- understand the player pathways available for deaf players including the appropriate structures for competition.

Including deaf participants is little different from including any other group of players or volunteers. For example, the skills and qualities needed to be a good coach will be the same no matter who the players are.

With the right awareness and adaptation techniques, coaches, administrators and other volunteers should be able to help all deaf participants, regardless of their hearing ability, to achieve their own potential and individual aspirations in a safe supportive environment.

NOTE: NDCS uses the word ‘deaf’ to refer to all levels of hearing loss. This guide is meant as a guide for deaf players and those with hearing impairments of any type.

Why do deaf people play rugby union?

Rugby union is one of our major national team sports enjoyed by millions across the country whatever their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and physical or intellectual ability.

Rugby union is extremely popular with deaf people and many of these individuals play in mainstream mini, youth and senior training and competition week in, week out. One of the most important issues to understand is why deaf people become involved in the sport and what benefits they get from this involvement. This understanding will help enable you to provide all participants with a positive, welcoming environment that challenges and engages them.

Photo: Gerry McManus

Below are some of the reasons why deaf people might get involved. You will notice that they are the same reasons why anyone else, deaf or otherwise, would choose to take part:

- Improve fitness
- Develop new skills
- Achieve in competition and gain recognition
- Make friends
- Be involved in 'something good', be part of a community
- Experience a personal challenge
- Experience the thrill of competition
- Enjoyment.

You may also have recognised that sport can offer individuals a great deal more than simply an opportunity for participation, friendship, enjoyment and success. It can develop other skills that will enhance many areas of daily life:

- Improve confidence and self-esteem
- Learn how to take responsibility and work as a team
- Handle pressure and stress
- Cope with disappointments and setbacks as well as success.

These are valuable skills for everyone. They will be particularly important for deaf people who may gain greater confidence in social situations through participation in sport.

Safeguarding vulnerable groups

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in rugby union is a key role of the Rugby Football Union (RFU), the sport's governing body. Young deaf people within the sport are potentially more vulnerable to 'harm' than those without hearing impairments. This document identifies a wide range of good practice which will help minimise the risk of harm to young deaf players, making their experience as enjoyable as possible. Further information can be found in the RFU's Safeguarding Policy and guidance notes. Go to www.rfu.com/ManagingRugby/SafeguardingChildren.aspx. Any concerns over the safety of a young or vulnerable person in rugby union should be reported to the RFU's Safeguarding Team:

Email: rmg@therfu.com
Phone: 0871 222 2120

Photo: Gerry McManus

England Deaf Rugby Union

England Deaf Rugby Union (EDRU) was set up in 2003, following the first ever Deaf Rugby World Championships. Wales Deaf Rugby Union became the first world champions. It was recognised that that there were significant numbers of deaf players playing in England and that they would like the opportunity to represent their country.

The RFU and EDRU have been working in partnership for approximately five years, after EDRU initially approached the RFU for help and guidance in establishing an England – Deaf Rugby side. EDRU has a large database of players currently playing in the RFU club structure but it's still looking for more players around the country who are capable of reaching the international level of England – Deaf Rugby. Despite being an England team, players are drawn from many levels of the rugby union league structure – several play in national league teams but most play in level 4 or below.

More recently EDRU has, in conjunction with one of its sponsors, Npower, undertaken a schools coaching programme where coaches and current players visit schools for deaf children to deliver TAG rugby coaching sessions to the pupils. It is hoped that this will continue to get the message across that deaf children can take part in a sport like rugby union and the benefits that participation can bring.

Players do not need to be profoundly deaf to play for EDRU. To qualify, senior players need an average hearing loss of '25dB bilaterally'. This translates to a mild level of deafness in both ears or a moderate level of deafness in one ear but normal hearing in the other. Whether players wear hearing aids or only communicate by sign language, they are able to communicate and play rugby as a standard team.

EDRU also wishes to see more deaf players taking part in rugby union. To this end, it can offer deaf awareness advice to clubs and schools to help integrate deaf players to clubs and liaise with club members to ensure the player(s) are managed correctly.

More information is available from EDRU's website: www.englanddeafrugby.com

ENGLAND DEAF

Understanding deafness

NDCS uses the word 'deaf' to refer to all levels of hearing loss.

At any one time, 1.6 million children in the UK experience deafness.

It is important to be aware that every individual's experience is different and the extent of people's hearing loss varies. This means there is a range of classifications for deafness and a wide variety of equipment, such as hearing aids, designed to help deaf and hard of hearing people.

This section of the guidance is designed to give you basic background knowledge of how the ear works, an understanding of deafness and the solutions and technologies available to enable deaf people to communicate more effectively.

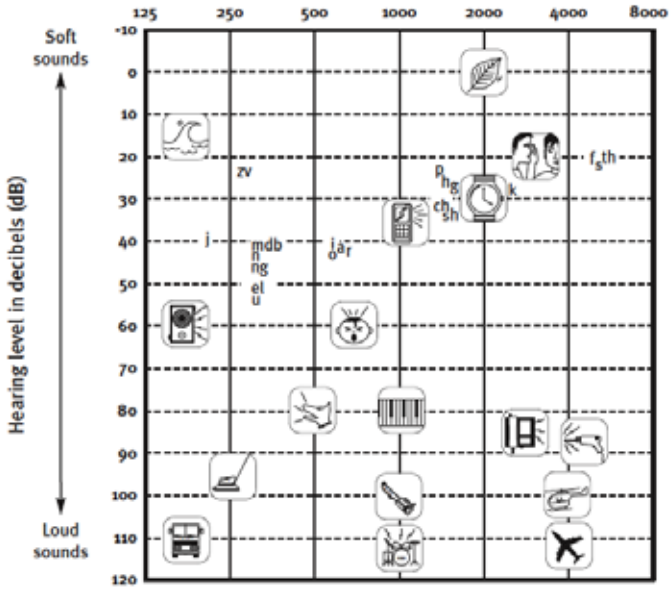
This knowledge will give you a better understanding of the deaf people who may join your club and enable you to understand why adaptations to your programmes may be necessary for the benefit of both the participants and your club.

What is sound?

Sound is an invisible vibration. It travels in waves, spreading outwards from the source of the sound and is made up of small and very quick changes in air pressure.

Individual sounds are different in both loudness (intensity) and pitch (frequency). Loudness is measured in decibels (dB). The decibel scale is logarithmic which means that every increase of 10 dB indicates that the sound is ten times louder. For example, if you turn the television up from 50 dB to 60 dB the sound you are listening to is ten times louder than before. This means that a sound of 100dB is actually one thousand million times louder than a sound of 10dB and not ten times louder as you'd imagine.

The 'pitch' of a sound is also important. A high-pitched sound is where sound waves happen at a very fast pace: this is why it is referred to as high frequency. Low frequency is where low-pitched sound is made up of slower sound waves. Frequency is measured in Hertz (Hz). Speech is a mixture of high and low-frequency sounds. Consonants are generally higher in frequency than vowels.



A visual representation of the loudness and pitch of a range of everyday sounds.

The crowd at a rugby match, for example, can generate around 120dB, a comparable sound to that of a jet plane taking off!

The ear

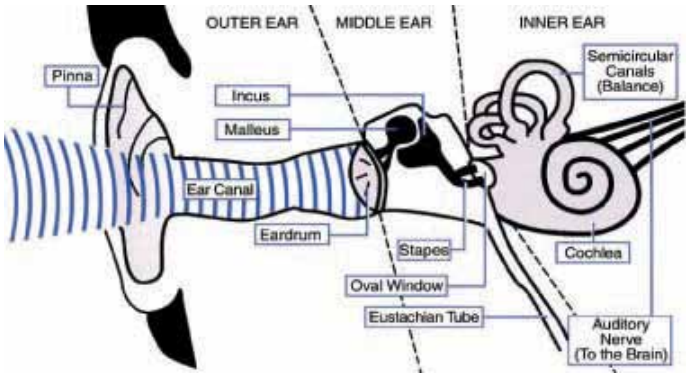
The ear has two functions: hearing and balance, both of which are closely connected.

Hearing involves the ear, part of the nervous system and part of the brain. All three must work together for you to be able to receive sound and be able to convert it into messages for the brain to understand.

Balance involves the semi-circular canals. These are three tubes filled with fluid that work like spirit levels sending messages to the brain when we move around.

The ear can be divided into three main sections:

- Outer ear
- Middle ear
- Inner ear



How the ear works

Sound waves enter the ear canal and cause the eardrum to vibrate. These vibrations are passed across the middle ear by three tiny bones: the hammer (malleus), anvil (incus) and stirrup (stapes). These act as levers, increasing the strength of the vibrations before they pass into the cochlea via the oval window. In the snail-like structure of the cochlea there are thousands of tiny sound-sensitive hair cells, which are set in motion by these sound vibrations. The movement of the hair cells is converted into electrical signals that travel along the auditory nerve to the brain where they are interpreted and given meaning.

Types of deafness

There are two main types of deafness, which are described below.

Conductive deafness

This is the most common type and occurs when sound cannot pass through the outer and middle ear to the cochlea and auditory nerve in the inner ear. This is often caused by fluid building up in the middle ear (known as glue ear). Glue ear can cause temporary deafness and often clears up naturally after a short period of time. However, it can also develop into a long-term condition requiring surgical intervention or the wearing of hearing aids.

Glue ear is very common in the under-8s and it is likely that in mini-and-youth rugby, coaches of young players may come across this. Glue ear should not stop children taking part in their regular rugby activities but it is useful to be aware that their ability to hear a coach's instructions may be reduced. Their confidence and occasionally their balance may also be affected. Adapting coaching sessions to fully include children with glue ear is important to maintain and improve their development and enjoyment of the sport.

Sensori-neural deafness or nerve deafness

Most cases of sensori-neural deafness are caused by loss of, or damage to, the hair cells in the cochlea that means that the cochlea is not processing the sound effectively. The deafness may be genetic (inherited) or caused by an illness or infection such as measles, mumps, rubella or meningitis. Sensori-neural deafness is permanent.

The inner ear also holds the semi-circular canals that send information to the brain about our balance. They too can be affected by the same cause as the deafness. This is something coaches and team managers in particular should be aware of. If working with young players, it might be worth asking parents if their child has had such problems in the past and how they manage any particular difficulties.

Degrees of deafness

NDCS uses the term 'deaf' to cover the full range of different levels and types of hearing loss. The definitions below are a simple way of understanding different levels of deafness.

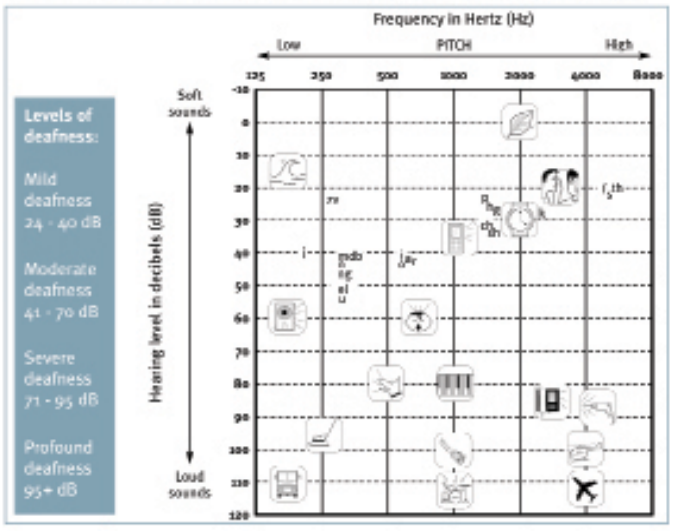
Mild deafness: (20-40dB of hearing loss).

- Children can usually hear everything that is said to them in a quiet room, but not if there is lots of noise present or they are far away from the speaker.
- A child would not be able to follow a whispered conversation.
- Some children with mild deafness use hearing aids.
- A child with glue ear will usually have mild deafness.

Moderate deafness: (41-70dB).

- Most children with moderate deafness use hearing aids.
- Without their hearing aids, they could hear most of what someone says to them in a quiet room as long as they speak clearly, but could not follow a conversation in a large group, if there is lots of background noise or they are far away from the speaker.

Visual representation of the loudness and pitch of a range of everyday sounds



Severe deafness: (71-95dB).

- Most children with severe deafness use hearing aids and most can follow spoken conversation with one person in a quiet room when using them.
- Even with hearing aids they may need additional support following speech in background noise and in groups.
- Without hearing aids they may not hear someone talking to them but may hear some other louder sounds like dogs barking or drums.

Profound deafness: (more than 95dB).

- Most children with profound deafness use either hearing aids or cochlear implants.
- Without hearing aids or cochlear implants they cannot hear someone talking but may be able to feel very loud sounds like lorries passing in the street.
- Even with hearing aids or cochlear implants they may need additional support to follow speech in background noise and in groups.
- Some profoundly deaf children will use signing as their main means of communication, and many others will use signing as a way to support their understanding of spoken communication.

It is very rare for a child to have no hearing at all but this may be caused by a congenital (born-with) abnormality in the inner ear, for example because there is no cochlea or hearing nerve, or because the cochlea has suffered extensive damage caused by an illness such as meningitis. In these children a hearing aid or cochlear implant would offer no benefit and they will use sign language as their main means of communication.

These are very basic descriptions of the varying degrees of deafness. It is important to remember that every individual's hearing ability is different and may not be easily classified. As a coach, team manager, first aider or volunteer it is worthwhile getting to know how much a deaf player in your team can hear in order to understand what their requirements are.

Impact of deafness on children and their language skills

Children develop communication, learning and social skills in their day-to-day activities. The impact of deafness in these areas will be different for individual children. No two deaf children are the same but any degree of deafness can affect a child's access to communication.

Being unable to access communication often has the greatest impact on language development. English is a spoken language, and from a very early age we learn about speech patterns and sentence structures from listening to people talking.

Deaf children usually hear some frequencies (pitch) better than others. For example, 'm', 'b' and 'd' are low-frequency speech sounds and 's', 'f' and 't' are soft, high-frequency sounds. This means the deaf child may only hear some of the speech sounds and may not hear part of a word. For example;

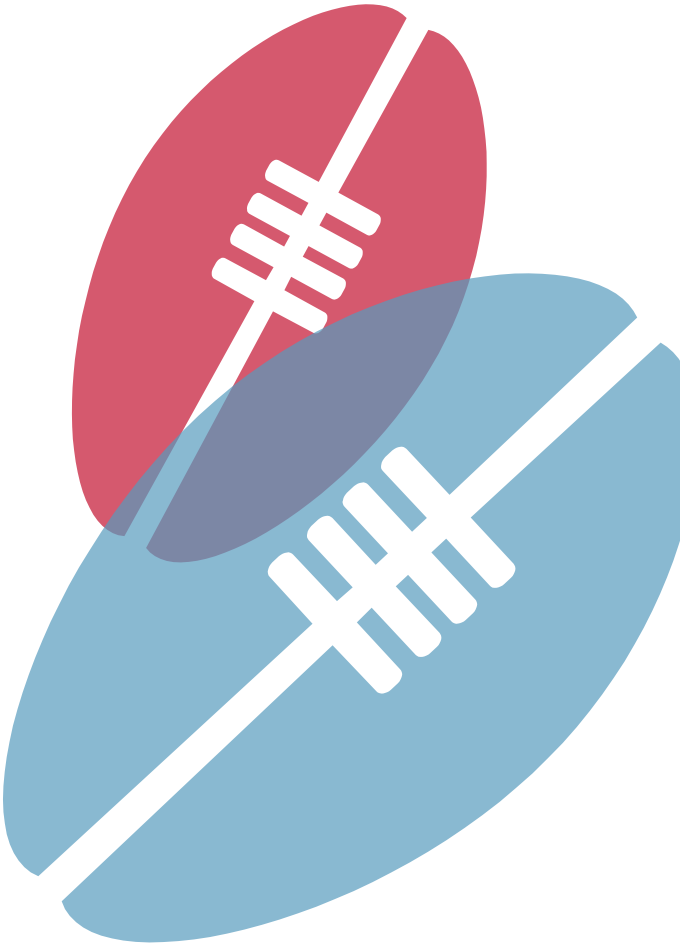
"offside" they may only hear "o'ide"
"tackle" they may only hear "'ackle"
"scrum" they may only hear "'crum"
"field" they may only hear "'ield"

Deaf children may have a limited vocabulary because they do not hear different words being used in conversations around them and may not be confident that they have heard a new word correctly. This includes place names and technical terms that might be used occasionally in conversations about rugby union.

Remember a deaf child may:

- not be able to hear enough to make sense of what is said
- think that they have understood fully and not realise that they have missed out on important information (such as how to do a particular training activity correctly or the kick-off time of the next match)
- misunderstand what is said.

It is really important to communicate clearly using gestures and sign language where appropriate as well as using visual aids such as pictures and photographs. When unsure if a group or a deaf child has understood, it is useful to ask them to repeat back what you have just said so you can check they have understood. Offer children the opportunity to ask you questions both in a group and individually, as many children may not want to ask for clarification in front of their peers.



Hearing aids and cochlear implants

Most hearing aids work by making the sounds going into the ear louder. Hearing aids come in various shapes and sizes and all are programmed to closely match the individual child's hearing loss.

Most children use hearing aids that are worn behind the ear (BTE) although rarely a child will be using a body-worn (BW) model. Behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids are the most common type. Most children will wear two hearing aids. A hard plastic 'elbow' allows the hearing aid to hang on the top of the ear and joins the hearing aid to the ear mould that sits inside the ear.

Hearing aids can be set to have one or more listening programmes. The child is likely to know which programme they should use at which times and should be comfortable with adjusting their hearing aid themselves. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure their child's hearing aid is working correctly and the programme used is appropriate.

A hearing aid consists of a microphone and an amplifier. The microphone picks up the sounds in the environment and the sounds are then made louder. The amplified sound then travels through the ear mould, into the ear canal. Hearing aids enable people to make the most of any residual hearing they may have. They do not restore typical hearing levels. It is important to remember that all noise, including background noise, is amplified by hearing aids, making communication difficult in noisy environments.

The hearing aid microphone works best at a distance of between one and two metres from the speaker in quiet conditions.

Almost all hearing aids used by young children will be digital. Digital hearing aids use a mini-computer to process the sounds that are received through the microphone. They are adjusted by programming the processor inside the hearing aid.

Children with permanent conductive hearing losses, for example caused by a congenital (born-with) abnormality of the outer or middle ear, may use a bone conduction or bone anchored hearing aid. A bone conduction hearing aid is held in place by a soft or metal headband that is removable. A bone anchored hearing aid is clipped onto a metal fixture that has been implanted into the skull bone behind the ear. Both bone conduction and bone anchored hearing aids work by converting sound into mechanical vibrations. The hearing aid is worn on the skull bone behind the ear (known as the mastoid) and the vibrations stimulate the inner ear (cochlea) whilst bypassing the outer and middle ears.

Cochlear implants

Cochlear implant systems work differently from hearing aids. Instead of amplifying sound they use electrodes, which are implanted in the cochlea, in the inner ear, to provide electrical stimulation of the nerves that the brain interprets as sound.

These electrodes are connected to a receiver that is implanted into the skull behind the ear. This receives electronic information from the transmitter, which is held in place across the skin on the head using a magnet. The internal package is not removable, but the external elements of the system may be removed. Without the outer package in place the user is profoundly deaf, as the procedure used to implant the device usually results in any of the user's residual hearing being destroyed.

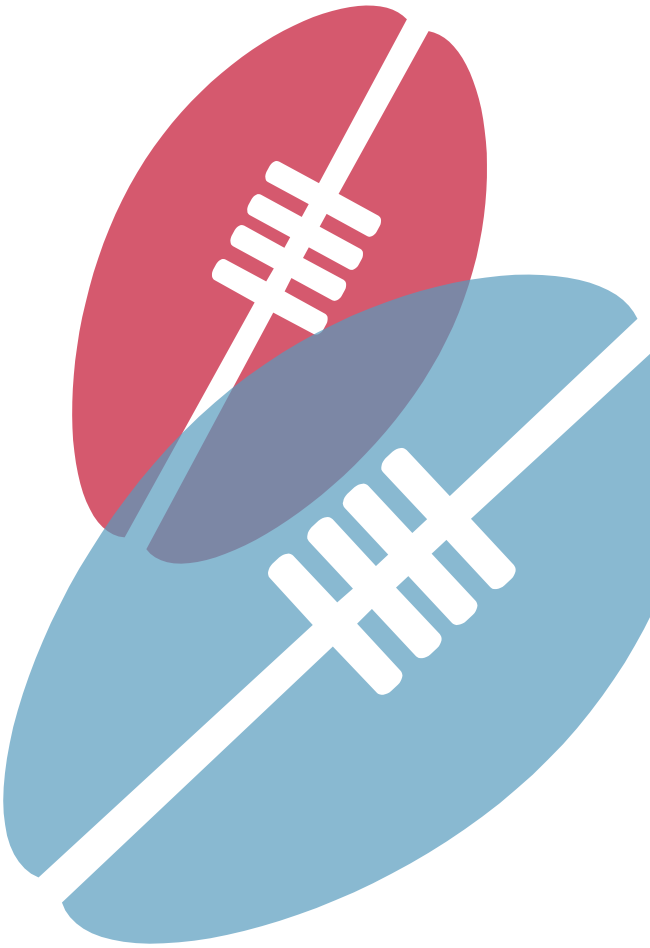
The user wears a microphone which is usually worn like a behind-the-ear hearing aid. The speech processor is either body worn and connected by a lead to the microphone, or contained with the microphone in the behind-the-ear unit.

The speech processor converts incoming sound from the microphone into electronic signals that are then passed to the transmitter and onto the receiver in the skull. These signals are then passed to the implanted electrodes in the cochlea.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are powered by batteries. Some are disposable and some are rechargeable. The time between changes will vary depending on the length of time the child wears the hearing aids and how powerful the equipment is. Some hearing aid batteries will last for several weeks; many cochlear implants require new batteries daily. The child is usually able to change the battery themselves or can alert an adult that it needs to be replaced. All spare batteries must be disposed of safely.

It is important to understand that hearing aids and cochlear implants are not a 'total solution' for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Every individual will benefit from their audiological equipment differently. It is important for coaches to learn how well deaf children in their club can hear and understand.

There is further information on the use of hearing aids and cochlear implants in the next section 'Laws of the Game of Rugby Union'.



Hearing aids, bone anchored hearing aids, cochlear implants and the 'Laws of the Game of Rugby Union'

The laws of the sport of rugby union clearly state that it is a 'sport for all' whatever the players' abilities. However, the application of some of the laws does give rise to issues for players with hearing impairments. Sections on Law 4 which may be interpreted to relate to hearing instruments are listed below:

4.4 BANNED ITEMS OF CLOTHING
(b) A player must not wear any item that is sharp or abrasive.
(c) A player must not wear any items containing buckles, clips, rings, hinges, zippers, screws, bolts or rigid material or projection not otherwise permitted under this Law.
(h) A player must not wear any item that is normally permitted by Law, but, in the referee's opinion that is liable to cause injury to a player.
(j) A player must not wear communication devices within that player's clothing or attached to the body.

4.5 INSPECTION OF PLAYERS' CLOTHING
(a) The referee or the touch judges appointed by or under the authority of the match organiser must inspect the players' clothing and studs for conformity to this Law.
(b) The referee has power to decide at any time, before or during the match, that part of a player's clothing is dangerous or illegal. If the referee decides that clothing is dangerous or illegal the referee must order the player to remove it. The player must not take part in the match until the items of clothing are removed.
(c) If, at an inspection before the match, the referee or a touch judge tells a player that an item banned under this Law is being worn, and the player is subsequently found to be wearing that item on the playing area, that player is sent off for misconduct.

The laws of the sport are designed and implemented to ensure the safety of all participants on the pitch. There are some concerns in this regard for players with hearing aids:
1. injury to self
2. injury to other players
3. damage to hearing aid equipment.

Wearing hearing aids during matches

Hearing aids are sensitive pieces of electronic equipment and risk being broken in contact situations or lost if they fall out of the ear during vigorous activity. For this reason, and because the laws of the sport technically prohibit their wearing, many deaf people choose to play without their hearing aids. This does not often cause any problems as many individuals can lipread, or adapt their communications, especially receiving information, according to the situation.

However, others prefer to wear their hearing aids, particularly if they play in mainstream teams, so that they can use them to hear instructions or calls from team-mates or the referee. The aid is often hidden under a padded 'scrum-cap' and thus never noticed by the referee or opposition. As players in many positions in the sport now wear padded headgear, a hearing-aid user can evade detection with relative ease.

The Rugby Football Union does not advocate such activity and any player (and/or their parents) allowing/undertaking this activity does so at their own risk. The referee does have the right to enforce the removal of hearing aids.

It is generally accepted that participants can use their aids when playing non-contact versions of the sport provided they are comfortable and securely fitted. If in doubt advise parents to ask for further advice from their audiologist (hearing specialist). In full-contact rugby (where players tackle, scrummage, ruck and maul) however, it is accepted that there is a risk of harm.

The Rugby Football Union advises that players should remove their hearing aids for all full-contact rugby union activity and that coaches and officials be made aware of any hearing impairment to ensure a higher degree of empathy with that player's communication needs.

All international deaf rugby unions enforce the removal of all hearing devices for all players for both training and playing the sport in representative (i.e. international) training and matches.

Wearing bone anchored hearing aids and cochlear implants during training or matches

Having a bone anchored hearing aid involves having a skin-penetrating abutment (fixture) implanted in the skull bone behind the ear that the hearing aid clips on to. Having a cochlear implant involves having a receiver package implanted under the skin behind the ear and an external package that is worn similarly to a hearing aid. There are players in our sport who use such devices, but do so with the external parts removed and a padded head-guard – sometimes with a degree of extra padding around the site of the implant. This does cause some difficulty when applying elements of Law 4 as the remaining equipment is located under the skin and is not removable.

In these situations playing rugby union does pose risks to the individual. The main risk is from suffering a blow to the head on or around the site of the implant. Such an impact risks harming the skin around it, and in the case of cochlear implants damaging the internal package. Although the risk is small, this could mean that it becomes necessary for the individual to have repeat surgery.

NDCS states that, "Parents of deaf children should discuss the potential risks with their bone anchored hearing aid team or cochlear implant team professional and obtain further advice before undertaking the sport. Additionally, the British Cochlear Implant Group advises against participating in sports where physical injuries, pressure and blows to the head are likely. If, after discussing the risks, they choose to participate in the sport then the external parts of the device must be removed and suitable head padding used."

It is advised that players who have recently had cochlear implant surgery do not play until the operation site has fully healed (approximately six weeks). More information can be found at www.bcig.org.uk.

It is advised that players who have recently had bone anchored hearing aid surgery do not play while osseointegration of the implanted fixture and skull bone occurs. (Osseointegration is the formation of new bone around the implant.) This may take up to six months. Further advice should be sought from the child's ENT surgeon.

Adult players should also be advised to follow the above guidance.

The Rugby Football Union advises that individuals considering taking part in the sport do so only after considering all the issues detailed above and after consultation with their implant surgeon or audiologist. Participation in the sport by a bone anchored hearing aid or cochlear implant user may then take place as long as all external parts of the system are removed and the user protects themselves and other players with the use of padded headgear in accordance with IRB Laws of the Game of Rugby Union - Law 4 (i.e. scrum-cap). The Rugby Football Union cannot accept any responsibility for injury to the individual or damage to their hearing instruments.

Due to the nature of the cochlear implant procedure, all users will be profoundly deaf without their external equipment in use. As identified in the previous section, it is good practice to ensure the referee is aware that there is a profoundly deaf player on the pitch before the match begins and that suitable steps have been taken to ensure they can be aware of any decisions and signals given (also see section below on deaf players in the front row positions).

Refereeing deaf players and deaf players playing in the front row

In January 2008, representatives of England Deaf Rugby Union (EDRU) met with representatives of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) Referee Department and the RFU Equity & Inclusion Manager to agree guidelines for the refereeing of deaf and hearing impaired players, particularly those who play in the front row.

1. Clubs shall take responsibility for informing the referee, prior to the match commencing, if a deaf player will be present on the field of play at any time.

2. The club shall inform the referee of that player's position and number.

3. In the event of that player being a front row forward and unable to hear or understand verbal signals from the referee, the club will inform the referee of arrangements as to how that player will be made aware of the signal to engage the scrum.

4. The club must also inform the referee on how the player will disengage or be disengaged (by their team-mates) from the act of scrummaging once the whistle has blown (e.g. for scrum not formed correctly or wheeled).

5. The club must satisfy the referee that the arrangements will remain in place should any player involved in assisting the deaf player have cause to leave the field of play.

6. In the event that the referee is not satisfied with the arrangements either before or after seeing the arrangements in play, the referee shall be entitled to require uncontested scrums.

Deaf players who choose to play in the front row tend to find little difficulty in succeeding in this position. Extra support is required from their team-mates in the front row and any number of systems may be employed to ensure a safe and effective engage with the opposing team. These include a tap or squeeze from a team-mate; sensing the movement and pressure of their own pack; or simply reading the body language and movement of their own team-mates or opposite number. Coaches, however, must ensure the players reach a common, simple process that is strictly adhered to and used **every time** the scrum engages and that anyone from the team who may play or be substituted into a front row position knows the team's system.

Consideration must also be given to the communication of stoppages in play by the referee. There may be occasions when deaf players do not hear the whistle or see the referee signal and carry on playing, e.g. when chasing down a kick and the catcher calls for a 'mark'. Deaf players should be coached to have safeguards in place so that they do not continue playing after the whistle has been blown. Rugby clubs should create signals used by the whole team in order that they can communicate to a player that play has stopped. The referee should be informed of these signals prior to the start of the game.

Gaining under-18 deaf and hearing impaired players' attention

RFU safeguarding polices are designed to protect children from potential harm and also to protect the integrity of the adults who look after them. Consequently, physical contact between players and coaches is now often frowned upon. This can be a problem if, as coach of a junior team, you wish to get the attention of a deaf child who has their back to you and cannot hear you calling for them.

As this is a common issue for deaf people, it is quite acceptable to gain the attention of a deaf person by tapping them on the shoulder: this includes deaf young people.

There are other ways of gaining the person's attention, such as walking around them until they see your face. This can be used if you are still unsure about tapping them on the shoulder.

It is always wise to ensure that any communication between a coach and players takes place in an appropriate, open environment to protect both the child and the integrity of the coach.

Communication options and approaches

The information below describes the variety of communication options that are used by deaf people. Most deaf people will use a combination of these when communicating.

Auditory-oral/oral approaches

With the use of hearing aids, radio aids and cochlear implants to amplify residual hearing, people develop listening skills and spoken language.

Lipreading

This involves the ability to read lip patterns. Deaf children naturally pick up lipreading. However, many speech sounds look the same when spoken (e.g. 'pull' and 'ball') so it is difficult for deaf people to rely solely on lipreading to communicate. Lipreading is usually used alongside other communication approaches.

British Sign Language (BSL)

Over 70,000 people within the British deaf community use BSL. It is a visual language using hand shapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to communicate. BSL is an independent and complete language with a unique vocabulary. It has a structure and grammar different from that of the written and spoken English. As with other languages it has evolved over time and developed regional dialects. On March 18 2003 the Government officially recognised BSL as a minority language.

NDCS, in conjunction with the RFU, has developed an online resource showing a wide range of rugby terms in BSL for use by rugby clubs. These are available online from http://www.ndcs.org.uk/rfu.

Fingerspelling

This is where each letter of the alphabet is indicated by using the fingers and palm of the hand. It is used for signing names and places or for a word that does not have a sign. The British Fingerspelling Alphabet poster is available from www.ndcs.org.uk/me2.

Sign Supported English (SSE)

SSE uses signs taken from BSL. It is used in English word order but does not attempt to sign every word that is spoken. This may be an easier way to become familiar with sign language as it means that you can use signs together with your own language. As it uses the same signs as BSL, it can be helpful to children, parents and coaches who wish to develop BSL skills at a later stage.

Signed English (SE)

SE is an exact representation of the English language through the use of signs, where a sign is used for every spoken word. It is usually used in educational settings to develop written and spoken English skills. If a child uses BSL only to communicate they may not be able to fully understand SSE or SE due to the structural or grammatical changes.

Makaton

Makaton is a sign system that is used with children and adults (deaf and hearing), who may have communication and/or learning difficulties (for example, children with Down's syndrome). It uses speech together with signs (taken from BSL) and symbols and is grammar-free.

It is important that you do not make assumptions about a deaf player's communication method. When joining the club ensure that you ask parents and the young person what communication they use so that you can prepare.

Communicating with deaf players

It is important that deaf players are given the same opportunities as everyone else in their team or club to learn new skills and enjoy the sport.

Good rugby clubs will understand the importance of good communication and the ability to offer all your members a safe, enjoyable and positive rugby experience.

Below are some simple communication hints and tips for coaches, referees, managers, first-aiders and others involved in rugby clubs to help ensure that deaf players are fully included in your coaching sessions, matches, meetings and other relevant social situations. You will find that many of these tips are useful for communicating with ALL participants, and especially players, regardless of any disabilities they may have and you will have come across them during other training and in other guidance notes. All it will take is some simple, commonsense adaptations to give all your members the opportunity to improve their skills, knowledge, experience, and enjoy themselves.

- Ask the personyou are speaking to if you are communicating clearly and if there are ways you can improve things. Most will be happy to tell you if you ask!
- Encourage deaf players to tell their team-mates of their communication difficulties and explain how they can best receive (and give) communication.
- Ensure you have the full attention of all the players before speaking. (This could simply involve calmly raising your arm and waiting for the group to stop talking/signing and face you.)
- Ensure you are speaking in a well-lit area and that the participants can see your face. If using lights indoors/outdoors make sure that light is shining on your face. Lights shining directly behind you will cause your face to be in shadow and it will be much harder to lipread you.
- Try to stay in one place, maintaining eye contact when talking rather than walk around the pitch, changing room or clubhouse. If you need to move elsewhere (for example, to move cones), then do not talk during this period. Try and stay within easy talking distance of the players.
- When talking, avoid standing in front of a distracting background or in a noisy area (such as near a busy road or in a room with a TV on). It can be especially hard to concentrate on listening when such distractions are taking place, particularly for children.
- Relax and speak clearly. Do not exaggerate lip movements or facial expressions because this distorts the shapes you would normally make and can make it more difficult for people to understand you.
- Do not shout or raise your voice. This does not improve a deaf person's ability to understand you and your facial expressions as shouting can make you look angry. It may, however, be necessary to speak louder and clearly, particularly if a child uses their hearing aids to ensure they have heard what is being said.
- Give out brief and simple instructions. Tell the players what topic you will be discussing beforehand.
- Do not eat or chew gum while speaking or block your face with your hand. Many deaf players rely on lipreading and your face, especially the mouth, needs to be as clear as possible.

- Try to use as little jargon as possible and make one point at a time.

- If a new person is going to speak, they should raise their hand first to signify they will now be talking: this allows the person time to turn and face the new speaker. If there is more than one coach, always speak one at a time.

- If possible, always use demonstrations to ensure greater understanding of what you want the players to do. Try not to talk and demonstrate at the same time!

- Use pre-agreed visual signals for different actions during a sport or training session (for example, for stop, play, scrum, penalty, and so on). Most can be fairly straightforward and can simply be the same signals a referee would use in a match. For coaches, always check that the players understand prior to a sport or session. Use these visual signals as well as, or instead of, oral signals (whistles, shouting and so on).

- With young people, make up your own signals and involve all the players in inventing them. Children will enjoy doing this and it will help improve awareness of deafness and any players in their team who are deaf. It may also give your team an advantage over other teams who won't understand what your signals mean and won't know what you are going to do next!

- If players are spread out over the pitch during a training session and you need to speak to them all, stop the session using pre-agreed visual signals and bring them in to the middle of the pitch before speaking. If you need them to remember their positions then tell the players to leave a marker on the pitch where they were standing (for example, their bibs).

- Combine clapping with a double hand wave to congratulate or praise. When we see something good or a try is scored, the natural reaction is to clap. The deaf community will used a raised double hand wave to show the same appreciation, so for a mixed group use both methods.

- Be patient. For coaches and referees, be aware that players may not respond straightaway to verbal or even visual signals, especially during a match situation.

- Persevere. If a person does not understand, don't give up. Try a different way of communicating or explain again more clearly.

- Write things down if really stuck; take a notebook with you onto the field or into the meeting if necessary.

- When arranging future training sessions, meetings, social events or matches, it might be easier to hand out a slip of paper to all the members with the details on. This not only helps members who are deaf understand exactly what is planned, but also helps other players. They won't be able to use any excuses now for turning up late!

- Learn to fingerspell or learn British Sign Language. You can find details of courses and contacts at the back of this course pack.

Communicating by telephone

As a coach, you will be aware that you spend a lot of time organising coaching sessions, matches, and so on and you will be contacting the players, parents and other relevant parties on a regular basis. When not face-to-face, the most obvious way of communicating, and the quickest, is by telephone.

Some deaf people may be able to have a conversation via telephone but be aware that this is not the case for a lot of deaf people. If you need to speak to a deaf person and the phone would be the quickest and most logical choice of communicating, think first before assuming the person can hear on a phone. Even if you are able to have a face-to-face spoken conversation with them, the phone might not be suitable because it takes away the ability to lipread, which may be a vital part of their ability to understand conversations.

The easiest way of finding out this information is to simply ask the person if they can use the phone. If the answer is yes, also ask if you will need to adapt slightly. For example, not speaking so fast or making sure you are not in an area with lots of background noise.

If they cannot have a telephone conversation, also ask about what alternative ways you can communicate with them. Many deaf people have mobile phones for text messaging and use these as their main method of communicating on a day-to-day basis.

You can also use a service called 'Text relay' formerly known as 'typetalk'. This is a telephone relay service that involves communicating via an operator who converts what has been spoken into text. This is then displayed onto the screen of a textphone for the deaf person to read at the other end of the line. They can either talk back to you directly or type out their reply and the operator will tell you exactly what has been typed. More information about the Text relay service can be found at www.textrelay.org.

Working with BSL communicators

If there is a deaf member whose first language is BSL attending your rugby club, session or match then they may be supported by a volunteer communicator, communication support worker (CSW) or BSL interpreter to ensure the player can fully communicate with the other members.

However, it should be stressed that this is a last resort, especially after you have finished reading this guidance! By putting into practice the communication tips and guidelines, as well as learning basic BSL and rugby related 'buzzwords', communicating with deaf members directly should be your aim as a deaf-friendly rugby club.

Below are a few guidelines on working with BSL communicators

Volunteer communicators – NDCS uses volunteers to communicate during children's events and activities including rugby coaching sessions. Volunteer communicators will have achieved Signature formally known as CACDP* (Council for the Advancement of Communicating with Deaf People) Level 2 or above and will be able to sign your instructions to the group. When using NDCS volunteers, please remember they are volunteers and are not professionally trained CSWs or interpreters.
Cost – travel expenses.

Communication support workers or CSWs – help with communication between deaf students and hearing tutors. They are based mainly in educational settings, schools, colleges, universities and so on. CSWs will have a minimum of Signature / CACDP Level 2 signing and are working towards or hold the Edexcel Professional Development Award in Communication Support Work with Deaf Learners.
Cost – varies

BSL interpreters – BSL interpreters are professionally qualified to translate between English and BSL. Junior trainee interpreters (JTIs) have a minimum of Signature /CACDP* level 3 BSL skills, trained interpreters hold level 4 and have proven knowledge of interpreted standards. Interpreters are registered with the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) and are booked for professional meetings, interviews, training and conferences.
Cost – costs vary depending on the interpreter and agency that you use but can range from £25 to £40 per hour. Interpreters usually charge for a minimum of two hours along with additional travel expenses.

*Signature (formally known as CACDP – The Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People) levels. They are similar to the 1st4Sport Coaching Course award structure with students working their way up starting at Level 1 up to Level 4. Those with Level 4 signing skills are usually full-time interpreters.

When working with communicators, it is important to be aware of the following points:

- Make sure that you let the communicator know in advance what you plan to do during a session – perhaps hand them a copy of the session plan, agenda or other documentation. This will allow the communicator time to prepare and ask any questions about the session that they may not understand.

- Position yourself so the participants can see both you and the communicator clearly. Standing with the communicator side by side is usually the most effective way to do this. In a meeting the communicator is best placed opposite the chairperson of the meeting.

- Talk to the group/person directly rather than to the communicator, even if all the participants are deaf and all are looking at the communicator; you are the one who is there to coach the players.

- Speak clearly and not too fast: it is hard work listening to someone speaking and then translating his or her words into BSL!

- Make sure that the communicator and the deaf participant(s) get a break from watching. This could include scheduling regular drinks breaks or break out activities.

- If you are asking a question of a group and you want a response, wait until the communicator has finished signing before allowing a response. This gives both the deaf participant(s) the chance to respond and the communicator more time to interpret.

- You cannot look at two places at once so, when demonstrating or working from a whiteboard or flip-chart, build in a time lapse so that the deaf participants can look at you and then turn their attention to the communicator, otherwise they will miss the explanation. Remember, coaches should not be talking during demonstrations anyway!

- Try and use basic BSL yourself, even if the communicator is present. This will help you communicate directly to the deaf participant(s) and help build a relationship with them as you would a hearing player.

Be aware that it is impossible to learn BSL just from this guidance or from the internet. If you would like to learn BSL and communicate with BSL users then the best place to start is to take a course taught by a qualified sign language teacher.

Contact Signature for more information on hiring a BSL interpreter or attending a BSL course yourself. Their details can be found at the back of this booklet.

Health and safety considerations

Safety considerations are an essential aspect of all rugby-related activities in a club. Coaching sessions and matches, social events and meetings must all be risk-assessed in order to ensure the safety of all involved, regardless of whether there are deaf or hearing players.

For example: coaches must also be aware of the specific individual needs of all their players. This can include people who are deaf or with other disabilities. Coaches should factor in these considerations when organising and delivering their coaching sessions and matches. This is particularly crucial when coaching the contact areas of the sport – scrum, tackle, ruck, maul, line-out. During sessions when players are working on these aspects coaches should be careful to ensure that communication with the players is fully understood before the practising of the technique begins.

Fire safety

It is essential to be aware that deaf people may not be able to hear the fire alarms. If the fire alarm has gone off, coaches and officials should follow their club's fire safety policies and guidelines. Particular care should be given to ensuring that any deaf players under their care are accounted for. This may also involve checking the toilets and changing rooms, for example, where deaf players may not have realised the alarm has gone off. This may include physically entering all the toilets and rooms, should it be safe to do so, to ensure everyone is out.

Many modern fire alarm systems feature flashing lighting systems that alert deaf people to the emergency. When replacing old systems your club should consider the needs of all participants.

Delivering coaching sessions

All the general principles of how to establish goals and the planning, organisation and delivery of coaching sessions are equally applicable when coaching deaf players.

By using common sense and considering the welfare and enjoyment of all players, coaches often need to make only minor adjustments and adaptations to coaching sessions to ensure all players are fully included and health and safety considerations are met.

The next section shows how, as coaches, you can adapt sessions and match situations to include deaf participants.

Preparation work

If you are going to be using a communicator it is a good idea to have a basic plan of each coaching session for them to look through in advance. This will give them time to prepare and also ask any questions they may have. Of course, this is also beneficial for you as a coach because it allows you to plan the session and enables you to deliver a quality training session for all players.

Visual signals

Visual signals are vital for training sessions involving deaf rugby players and are often the only adaptation needed to ensure all players are fully involved. The benefits of the signals are twofold. Firstly, for practical reasons, a deaf player may not be able to hear or understand a coach speaking or hear a whistle being blown while they are concentrating on an activity or sport. A visual signal allows them to fully understand what is going on. Secondly, visual signals are used for health and safety reasons, such as if a session needs to be stopped for an injured player.

It is important that the coach makes all the players aware of what these signals mean before beginning an activity or sport. If the session involves both deaf and hearing players, the coach can use both visual and verbal signals.

The main visual signals can include:

- Raising an arm to signify players should stop what they are doing and pay attention to the coach.
- Raising and waving a brightly coloured bib/flag/shirt if you want the session to stop immediately or for them to change direction, etc. (always use same colour so players know exactly what it means).
- Signals similar to those referees use to show certain actions (for example, play on, simulating throwing action to denote a line-out).

Warm ups

Warm ups and cool downs are essential aspects of a coaching session or match situation. They should be fully inclusive and often need very little adaptation beyond some visual signals to ensure deaf players understand what to do. It is important to be aware that the coach will only need to speak to the group as a whole before the warm up games begin in order to explain what the players need to do. Nothing needs to be said during the games themselves, other than words of encouragement for hearing players (and visual signals such as the thumbs up for deaf players who might not hear your verbal encouragement).

Here are a few examples of warm ups using strong visual signals.

Traffic lights

Each player has a ball; the players move around the designated area with the ball in their hands. When the coach holds up a red cone they must all stop and put the ball down. Introduce a yellow cone and the players must throw the ball up and catch it. A green cone denotes that the players must increase their speed with the ball. This system can be used with any skills and many colours of cones.

Pairs

Players jog around a designated area trying to dodge each other. When coach holds up two cones all players must get into pairs. Any player not in a pair is out. This also works if the coach holds up three, four or even five cones in turn until there are only two players left.

These examples show that the actual content of the warm ups and the benefits they have on the players stays essentially the same. In many cases, these activities can have a positive effect on all players' development. For example, holding up cones and other visual signals encourages the players to look up more, thereby improving their spatial awareness on the field of play.

Cool downs

If players and coach are moving together (such as jogging round outside of pitch), then it is useful to tell or show the players what will be taking place before starting off (for example, copy what coach is doing whilst jogging). Coaches should position themselves so deaf players can see what they are doing; lipreading is very difficult whilst on the move, as is signing. Visual actions will make it much easier for the players to understand what to do.

Demonstrating

By now you should realise that there is very little adaptation needed from coaching sessions involving hearing players. It is simply a case of using commonsense communication techniques and using clear visual signals to ensure you are communicating clearly with your players.

When delivering any activities, it is always best to demonstrate what you wish the players to do beforehand. By using demonstrations, the players will have a visual representation of how to do each activity. This not only helps deaf players understand what to do, but is a useful coaching tool for all players.

Try following these simple steps:

- Briefly explain what the activity involves and what you wish the players to do.
- Demonstrate the activity, but remember – do not speak whilst doing the demonstration.
- Ask for understanding (repeat if anyone has not understood).
- Start the activity.

Match situations

As with training situations, there are very few adaptations to make in a match situation to ensure deaf players can take a full and active role in proceedings.

Coaches and officials must be aware of the possible need for visual signals as well as verbal signals to ensure all players understand the decisions of the referee.

Deaf participants play or are usually involved in mainstream rugby teams. It is, however, commonplace for them to be playing in matches with officials who may not have had any experience of officiating deaf players before. It may be useful to speak to the official(s) beforehand to inform them that there is a player who may not react immediately or understand when the referee blows their whistle or speaks to the player.

Please also refer to section on the 'Laws of the Game' (see page 13) for current RFU guidance on participation of deaf players.

Below are the main points to make to officials.

- Be patient if the player does not react to a referee's whistle or instructions straight away, they may not have heard or understood if they are busy concentrating on the ball or play.

- Use visual representations of what actions are required (e.g. simulating a line-out or scrum). In general, however, players understand the basic signals all referees use and this should be sufficient for all players.

- When playing in deaf matches as a team, or with a group of players with little experience of playing against deaf teams, make arrangements for them to wave at the deaf player(s) when the whistle is blown to alert deaf players not looking at the referee. Of course, honesty and trust is needed in such a situation!

- It may also be worth asking the referee to wave a brightly coloured flag (such as an assistant referee's flag) every time the whistle is blown. This visual signal will be more easily picked up by players who cannot hear the whistle.

If you use the last suggestion, be aware that this should only be done in agreement with the player in question before approaching the officials. Many players will be content with the status quo and may be embarrassed or unhappy with such adaptations being made for them, so check with them beforehand.

Rule adaptations

As deaf players can take a full and active part in mainstream rugby matches, it should be clear that no rule adaptations need to be made from the laws of the sport as laid down by the International Rugby Board.

Useful addresses and contacts

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)

NDCS is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

15 Dufferin Street, London, EC1Y 8UR
Freephone Helpline: 0808 800 8880 (voice and text)
Fax: 020 7251 5020
Email: helpline@ndcs.org.uk (general information)
www.ndcs.org.uk

The Rugby Football Union (RFU) & Rugby Football Union for Women (RFUW)

The RFU & RFUW are the governing bodies for the English sport. They are responsible for all regulatory aspects of the sport of rugby football in England.

Rugby House, Twickenham Stadium,
200 Whitton Road, Twickenham TW2 7BA
Phone: 0208 892 2000
Email: communityrugby@therfu.com
www.rfu.com

England Deaf Rugby Union (EDRU)

The EDRU is the governing body for deaf rugby union. EDRU is a registered charity and relies on donations and sponsorship to deliver its elite player programme including home internationals and a schools development programme across England.

Email: edru@btinternet.com
www.englanddeafrugby.com

British Cochlear Implant Group (BCIG)

The British Cochlear Implant Group is a professional body representing all the Cochlear Implant Centres and other specialist medical practitioners throughout the United Kingdom. The BCIG provides recommendations about the use of cochlear implants during activities and provides a full listing of cochlear implant centres across the UK.

Email: jeremy.lavy1@virgin.net or
jane.martin@bradfordhospitals.nhs.uk
(General enquiries only)
www.bcig.org.uk

RNID
A national charity for deaf people that aims to achieve a better quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing people. It does this by campaigning, lobbying, raising awareness of deafness, providing services and through social, medical and technical research.

19–23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Phone: 0808 808 0123 (Freephone information line)
Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk
www.rnid.org.uk

Text Relay
A telephone relay service providing vital communication links for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Phone: 0800 7311 888
Email: helpline@textrelay.org
www.textrelay.org

Sports Coach UK (1st4Sport Qualifications)
The regulatory body for coaching courses in the UK. The 1st4Sport qualifications are recognised and regulated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

Phone: 0113 201 5555
Fax: 0113 231 9606
Email: enquiries@1st4sport.com
www.1st4sport.com

Signature
Signature, formerly known as CACDP, is a registered charity aimed at raising standards of communication between deaf and hearing people through nationally accredited BSL courses.
It is also the registration body for professional BSL to English interpreters. It has a directory of registered interpreters and regular BSL courses throughout the country. If you want to find out where your nearest sign language course is taking place, please contact Signature for more details.

Signature, Mersey House, Mandale Business Park, Belmont, Durham DH1 1TH
Phone: 0191 383 1155
Textphone: 0191 383 7915
Fax: 0191 383 7914
Email: durham@signature.org.uk
www.signature.org.uk

British Deaf Association (BDA)
The BDA is the largest Deaf organisation in the UK that is run by Deaf people. It represents the sign language community and actively campaigns to improve standards and rights for Deaf and hearing sign language users.

It also has an extensive online information database of organisations, groups and services for Deaf people throughout the UK.

Phone: 02476 550936
Textphone: 02476 550393
Fax: 02476 221541
Email: headoffice@bda.org.uk
www.bda.org.uk

Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI)
ASLI is the professional association and support network for sign language interpreters in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its members include those who work as interpreters and deaf and hearing people who support their aims.

Fortuna House, South Fifth Street, Milton Keynes. MK9 2EU
Phone: 0871 474 0522
Fax: 01908 32 52 59
Email: office@asli.org.uk
www.asli.org.uk

NDCS provides the following services through our membership scheme. Registration is simple, fast and free to parents and carers of deaf children and professionals working with them. Contact the Freephone Helpline (see below) or register through www.ndcs.org.uk

- A Freephone Helpline 0808 800 8880 (voice and text) offering clear, balanced information on many issues relating to childhood deafness, including schooling and communication options.
- A range of publications for parents and professionals on areas such as audiology, parenting and financial support.
- A website at www.ndcs.org.uk with regularly updated information on all aspects of childhood deafness and access to all NDCS publications.
- A team of family officers who provide information and local support for families of deaf children across the UK.
- Specialist information, advice and support (including representation at hearings if needed) from one of our appeals advisers in relation to the following types of tribunal appeals: special education needs (SEN); disability discrimination (relating to education); benefits.
- An audiologist and technology team to provide information about deafness and equipment that may help deaf children.
- A children's equipment grants scheme and the opportunity to borrow equipment to try out at home.
- Family weekends and special events for families of deaf children.
- Sports, arts and outdoor activities for deaf children and young people.
- A quarterly magazine and regular email updates.
- An online forum for parents and carers to share their experiences, at www.ndcs.org.uk/parentplace.

NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

NDCS Freephone Helpline:
0808 800 8880 (voice and text)

Email: **helpline@ndcs.org.uk**

www.ndcs.org.uk

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