



Supporting Adolescents in Transition to Post-School Education and Employment – Part 1

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Key facts

- ❖ Education and employment levels for people who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) are lower than for the general population;
- ❖ A number of in-school transition practices are associated with better post-school outcomes for students with disabilities;
- ❖ Secondary school students who are D/HH benefit from deafness-specific transition planning and preparation ;
- ❖ Practices that benefit the transition of D/HH students include collaboration between teachers of the deaf and school careers personnel, development of students' self-advocacy skills, and contact with D/HH adult role models.

The transition from school to post-school life can be difficult for all young people. For school-leavers who are D/HH, it can be especially difficult as they face a range of challenges and barriers to success in postsecondary education and the world of work. Optimal transition support and preparation during their secondary schooling is essential for these young people to have the best opportunity to succeed in further education and employment and achieve their potential in life.

Post-school education and employment outcomes

Recent studies in Australia, the U.S.A., and Europe report that the employment and income levels of adults who are D/HH continue to fall behind those of the general population. Qualifications in postsecondary education or training reduce this gap. ¹⁻⁴ Today, people who are D/HH have more access to postsecondary education and are attaining higher levels of education than in the past. However, non-completion of postsecondary courses continues to be a problem as students who are D/HH drop out at a higher rate than other students. Some students with a less than profound hearing loss are reluctant to disclose it and do not access their institution's disability supports; they may do so only when they are seriously struggling academically. Research shows that, even when provided with accommodations such as interpreters, note-takers, and captioning, students who are D/HH do not have full access to academic content. ⁵

In employment, people who are D/HH report facing many challenges and barriers, both attitudinal and environmental, and experience higher levels of stress and fatigue in many working environments. ⁶ Successful adults with hearing loss make the best possible use of accommodations such as interpreters and technological systems and devices. They also report the importance of personal attributes such as persistence, interpersonal skills, and self-advocacy skills. School-leavers who are D/HH need to have well-developed skills in these areas.⁵

Evidence-based best practices in transition for students with disabilities

In the 1990s, a model, or taxonomy, of transition practices for students with disabilities was developed by Paula Kohler in the USA.⁷ Since then, research studies have found many of the practices to be strong in-school predictors of improved student outcomes. The taxonomy has been endorsed as the "gold standard" in transition education by the

Division on Career Development and Transition of the Council for Exceptional Children. Specific practices are organised into five categories.

Transition Practices in the Kohler Transition Taxonomy

Category	Practices included
Student-focused planning	Transition plan development, active participation by the student in the planning process
Student development	Employment skills instruction, structured work experience, career and vocational curricula, transition assessments, and self-determination training
Family involvement	Actively involving the family in transition planning, educating families about transition-related issues, and empowering families to participate
Program structure	Policy, philosophy, strategic planning, program evaluation, resource allocation, and human resource development
Interagency collaboration	Strong links between employment services, local employers, and disability offices in universities and colleges

The Student Development practices are strongly associated with post-school outcomes. Work experience is particularly important. For students who are D/HH, it is most valuable when it is followed by discussion with a knowledgeable professional about challenges the student encountered and ways to minimise these in the future.

Self-determination involves skills and behaviours including goal-setting, decision-making, problem-solving, assertiveness, self-awareness, and self-advocacy. Self-determination skills are strongly linked to positive post-school outcomes. For young people who are D/HH, the skills of self-determination and self-advocacy, including when and how to disclose their hearing loss and to request accommodations, are of major importance.

Transition needs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing

So far there has been little research into the transition preparation and experiences of D/HH students. However, a small number of studies have been conducted in the USA and in Australia. Overall, the studies found a lack of deafness-specific transition preparation for these students and a lack of expertise in the schools to address their transition needs. They also found that students had low transition-related skills and knowledge.⁸⁻¹⁰ Many were unaware of accommodations, strategies, or systems that could help them in workplace settings. Students were worried about working in groups, requirements to speak on the telephone, and people not understanding the implications of their hearing loss. The students who were D/HH had less paid work experience than their peers without hearing loss, partly because they avoided jobs that involved serving the public.¹⁰

In school, parents and educators of students who are D/HH are responsible for providing them with appropriate accommodations and supports. After leaving school, young people must take on the responsibility and initiative of doing this for themselves.

They will need a range of skills to overcome the challenges and barriers they are likely to face in training, at college or university, and in their everyday working life. All the research suggests a need for explicit transition planning and instruction that includes issues related to hearing loss. Transition and career preparation programs for students without hearing loss, or for students with disabilities in general, are unlikely to be adequate in most cases. In summary, the following transition practices are recommended for secondary students who are D/HH:

- ❖ Career guidance from professionals knowledgeable about deafness-related issues
- ❖ Collaboration between teachers of the deaf and mainstream teachers and career counsellors on transition planning
- ❖ Preparation to identify and address potential difficulties in postsecondary education and employment
- ❖ Development of students' awareness of accommodations available and the legal obligations of postsecondary education and employers to provide them
- ❖ Help in accessing the increasing range of technical assistive devices and systems available
- ❖ Self-determination instruction, including self-advocacy, negotiation, and assertiveness skills
- ❖ Discussion of how and when to disclose hearing loss, explain its effects and inform employers of ways around any difficulties
- ❖ Work experience with follow-up discussion to maximize learning
- ❖ Family involvement and empowerment
- ❖ Strong links with agencies offering employment services and other post-school services
- ❖ Role models and mentoring, drawing on the wealth of experience of adults who are D/HH

Teachers of the deaf often play an important role in their students' lives, and can have a major positive impact on the transition process of secondary students who are D/HH.

References

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