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**UNDERSTANDING DEAFNESS: AN ABILITY AWARENESS VIDEO**

**by**

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**An Independent Study  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of:**

**Master of Science in Deaf Education**

**Washington University School of Medicine  
Program in Audiology and Communication Sciences**

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**Approved by:  
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*Abstract: The purpose of this video is to educate people about deafness and to teach people how to communicate with people who are deaf.*

## Understanding Deafness: An Ability Awareness Video

Swimming...kickball...field trips....DAY CAMP!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Every summer since I was twelve years old I have worked at day camps. I absolutely love day camps because you get to enjoy the other side of kids, the non-school side. Kids work on their social skills in the summer, advance in athletics, and explore their creativity. Last summer I ran a day camp for 12-14 year olds. Half of the kids in my camp had special needs. I had always worked with children with autism, downs syndrome, tourettes syndrome, and ADHD. However, last summer I worked with a thirteen year old girl who had a hearing loss. She refused to wear her hearing aids at camp, and I witnessed her social difficulties first-hand. As a thirteen year-old, the other kids knew there was something different about her. The girl had auditory memory problems that came across as laziness, rudeness, or confusion. At this point, I decided I would do my independent study on deaf awareness aimed at the peers of children with hearing impairments. This is so important because children who have someone in their class with a hearing impairment need to know how to communicate with them. By understanding deafness, hearing children can better communicate with their peers who are hearing-impaired. The purpose of the movie is to educate people about deafness and to teach people how to communicate with people who are deaf. The video explores deafness, devices, and communication strategies.

Deafness is a problem in the ear that means a person does not hear normally. People can have different degrees of hearing loss: mild, moderate, severe, or profound. The cause of hearing loss is usually unknown. However, environmental and genetic causes can exist. Environmental causes can include problems during pregnancy, ototoxic medications, or diseases. Genetic causes result from an inherited gene from the mother or father.

A hearing loss can occur in the outer, middle, or inner ear. The outer ear collects sound. The middle ear includes the three tiniest bones in the body (malleus, incus, and stapes) which vibrate. The inner ear contains moving hair cells that send messages to the brain. People who have a hearing loss due to a problem in the outer or middle ear have a conductive loss. People who have a hearing loss due to a problem in the inner ear have a sensorineural loss.

People with hearing loss can wear devices called hearing aids or cochlear implants to help them hear. A hearing aid is a device that makes sound louder. If you hear a hearing aid whistle, you can tell the person to push in their hearing aid. A cochlear implant is a device that is surgically implanted to send auditory messages directly to the brain. People who wear cochlear implants cannot go down plastic slides!!

People who wear devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants may talk, use sign language, or use both. Some deaf students also use interpreters to help them understand what is being said. An interpreter is a person who signs what another person says.

Since some deaf people talk, it is important to understand how to communicate with them. When talking to a deaf person, speak clearly, face the person, and do not cover your mouth. Talk naturally and rephrase your statement if the person does not understand what you are saying. To get their attention, you may have to tap their shoulder instead of yelling louder. Finally, it really helps to fill a deaf person in on announcements as well as jokes/sarcasm.

This video will help hearing children understand their peers with hearing-impairment. By fostering an awareness of deafness, hearing children can better communicate with their deaf friends. Awareness of deafness may alleviate communication breakdowns in social and academic settings between children who are hearing and children who are hearing-impaired.

