

## Sports & Other Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities and sporting events are very important for the overall educational and social experience for any child. Many lessons about team work, responsibility, winning, and losing happen during these activities.

Some difficulties that children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing may face:

- communication barriers with teammates and coaches when calling out plays, stopping the game, or calling for the ball
- wearing a helmet or a swim cap with hearing devices
- interacting with officials
- awareness of crowd support
- safety issues that pose dangers (e.g., cannot hear other competitors coming from behind in a cycling race)
- lack of understanding from teammates and competitors

The use of assistive technology is an important part of making athletics and other activities more accessible. Assistive technology can be integrated, within the boundaries of the rules, into the sport itself. It is the responsibility of the coach, the child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing, and the other team members to work together to identify where communication breakdowns are occurring and to identify solutions. The devices themselves are simply tools that are used to try to come as close as possible to the ideal situation.

Lights can be used in swimming, for instance, to start the race. When a starter pistol is fired or other auditory signal is given to indicate the start of a race, a light will go on to indicate the start. This method can be used for other sports such as track, boxing, basketball or other activities where a horn or gun are used for the start or at any point in the game. Flags or gestures such as waving can

be used to gain the attention of an athlete. A player may need to tag a referee or another player to gain their attention and vice versa. Visual aids such as score boards, white boards, or signs can be used to communicate. Interpreters are also widely used in sports. Coaches and teammates can learn some signs to help bridge the communication gap as well as using face-to-face communication and signals that the message is understood. One of the most important things may be to give a little extra time and patience when getting used to this modified way of play.

*Time Out! I Didn't Hear You!* is a **comprehensive** 88-page article providing the child, parent, coach, athletic director, principal, school-board member and educational audiologist with an abundance of information needed to make athletics accessible in a cost-effective and comfortable way. It suggests modifications for dozens of sports and competitions from archery to wrestling. A copy is available from the Alberta Hands and Voices Lending Library. A copy can also be found here: <http://www.pitt.edu/~cvp/timeout.pdf>.

Although thorough, the *Time Out! I Didn't Hear You!* article was originally published in 1996. Technology changes quickly – be sure to consider newer devices that may be able to accommodate your child's needs in and out of school. For more information, contact the various sports-focused organizations and clubs (e.g., Alberta Deaf Sports Association (ADSA)) in the *Resources* section of this toolkit.

Adapted from:

[-Hannah Scriver, American Sign Language: "Deaf and the Sports Community"](#)  
[-Accommodations: Sports and Extra-Curricular Activities, Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss](#)

Sports and extra-curricular activities is a vast topic, and it would be difficult to attempt to justly cover this topic considering the hundreds of sports and other activities available to your child. However, some of the most common questions on forums from parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children stem from

swimming lessons. Swimming lessons are often introduced very early in life, causing parents and children a lot of worry and frustration.

## Diving into Swimming Lessons

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Hearing aids, cochlear implant processors, and water don't usually mix. For this reason, many parents wonder what to do about swimming lessons.

Other parents and adults who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing shared their tips and experiences to make swimming lessons a big splash.

- **Talk to the instructor *before lessons start*.** If possible, arrange to meet in advance so the conversation isn't rushed.
- **Stick with some main points to start:** closer is better, get her attention before speaking, always face her when speaking, and make sure she understands the instructions. If possible, go over the instructions before she removes her hearing device(s). Maintain eye contact and ask her to repeat the instructions back to you if you are not sure that she has understood.
- **Bring a buddy** to help your child know what is going on.

For an older child, ask if he can have a friend in the class who can alert him to transitions in activities or to simple instructions.

One parent whose child was on the high school swim team arranged for a senior student volunteer to be with her in the water.

Another family got funding from the [Family Support for Children with Disabilities](#) program (FSCD) to pay for an aide to be in the water with their child. The aide was someone of their own choosing and the receipts were submitted to FSCD.

Another family applied to FSCD for a sign language interpreter for swimming lessons.

- **Don't go first.** Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing often watch other children for clues on what to do. Swimming lessons are no exception. If your child can be at the back of the line, or at least not have to go first, he can watch others when he's unsure of what is going on. Make allowances for a bit of a delay while he is watching - and he may miss some instruction while doing so.
- **Be expressive.** About 20% of communication is verbal; the remaining 80% is body language and facial expressions. Much of what you want to say can be expressed non-verbally. Agree to a few signals or cues for common commands, such as "stop," "blow bubbles," "up," "down," and "try again." These cues should ideally be large, slow, exaggerated gestures that will be easy to see and understand in the water. Some useful signs are obvious - like pointing up for "up" and down for "down" - but it's still a good idea to go over them before class. Another useful sign that most people know is "T" for "time out."



**STOP:** Using a large, slow, easily visible gesture, bring your right hand (open and flat) down to "chop" your open and flat left hand at waist level.

**TRY AGAIN:** Hold your right hand, half-folded, up near your ear, then dive it into the palm of your left hand near shoulder level.



### More comments from parents

*"Swimming, bathing, haircuts, and sleeping are the only times our son gets to go without his hearing aids. He seems to just follow along for swimming lessons. We tell the instructor that he's Hard of Hearing, and to always get eye contact. It's not*

*ideal, but it seems that teaching/learning swimming is a fairly visual thing. We really coach him to always watch his swim instructor, so he doesn't miss anything."*

*"My daughter doesn't really hear anything without her hearing aids and can't see past a few feet without her glasses so swimming lessons were a huge challenge. She hated it when she went with the regular school classes. I switched her to private lessons, and by coincidence, got an instructor whose mother is Deaf. So she knew to get right close to my daughter so that she could see her face and she taught her some American Sign Language (ASL) as well. It made all the difference in the world, she loved the private lessons! It's a long shot but maybe ask if any of the instructors know ASL or have a connection with the Deaf community so they know how to communicate appropriately."*

*"We made the instructor very aware and he was great at making sure he gave extra instruction to our son as well as making sure he was looking at him so he could see his lips. It's the only thing we've done that's been fairly painless."*

*"Our son has severe to profound hearing loss and wears hearing aids. We actually found swimming lessons to be quite successful. It could be that since he was not diagnosed until three years of age, he became a very visual learner. The group lessons were extremely beneficial to him as he could pick up on what he was supposed to do by watching others and seeing the instructor correct improper form. But then again we had an excellent instructor who allowed our son to go last to gain that knowledge."*

*"My children went to swimming lessons with no sign language. They did fine and passed their level. I only had to explain to the instructor how to communicate with Deaf children - after that, no problem. I took swimming and lifeguard lessons myself with no ASL. I felt there were no barriers because they were willing to work with me. It was a fun experience for me."*