Language deprivation is used to describe ongoing experiences of deaf children who have inconsistent access to a language, especially from birth to age 5. Though a deaf child might receive ongoing exposure to a spoken language, it may not be fully accessible to them. They can repeatedly miss important information. Technologies such as cochlear implants and hearing aids are tools that can improve hearing, but do not guarantee full access to language.

Most deaf children are born into families that have never met a deaf person or know a sign language.*

“Language deprivation is solved by making sounds accessible.”

Common myths about language deprivation and sign language

**True**

- Signed languages do not interfere with learning spoken and written languages.
- Bimodal bilingualism (signed and spoken/written languages) promotes healthy brain and social development for deaf and hearing children.

**False**

- Being deaf does not mean the child is naturally language deprived.
- Ongoing lack of accessible language input can cause language deprivation.

“Language deprivation is caused by deafness.”

What is language deprivation?

Language deprivation is preventable!

- Make sure deaf children are getting full, effortless access to at least one natural language.
- Educate parents, professionals, and the community to ensure deaf children get the best interventions possible.

A natural language is one that evolved naturally within a community for everyday communication, with complex grammar and vocabulary (Hall, et al., 2019).

What can language deprivation look like?

- Expressing and regulating emotions
- Language and communication
- Learning new things
- Keeping track of new information
- Making fulfilling relationships
- Concept of time
- Understanding ‘cause and effect’ or anticipating consequences

For more information, visit www.gallaudet.edu/deaf-hard-hearing-child-resilience-center/overview/

*We use the term sign language to acknowledge all natural signed languages used across the nation and globally.