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This Issue of Lakshana would focus on Total Communication – an approach to Deaf education that aims to make use of a number of modes of communication, which works best for the child. This method combines auditory and visual communication for instructions. A combination of sign systems, including Indian Sign Language (ISL) & American Sign Language (ASL), simultaneous use of speech and sign language, cued speech and/or other communication methods are used. In this approach the child and the families are encouraged to use:

- Finger Spellings
- Natural Gestures
- Lip-reading
- Oral Speech
- Body Language
- Listening through amplification devices
- Sign System/Sign Language (ISL or ASL)/Visuals



## The challenges Children With Hearing Impairment /Hearing Loss face in schools

Hearing ability is critical to speech and language development, communication and learning. Hearing Impairment/ Hearing Loss causes delays in the development of speech and language, and those delays then lead to learning problems, often resulting in poor school performance. Students with Hearing Impairment / Hearing Loss usually appear isolated in the learning environment. The possibility for social contacts and for interaction with other students is often limited, and this isolation or separateness has an impact on learning, confidence, self-esteem, and on their approach to learning.

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VAANI, Deaf Children's Foundation was registered as a Trust (Registration No. 4257) in Kolkata on August 9, 2005. We have FCRA permission. VAANI is registered u/s 12A of Income Tax Act-1961, and has approval under Section 80-G (5) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 (50% tax exemption).



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## Total Communication

**Total Communication (TC)** is a philosophy of educating children with hearing loss, by incorporating all means of communication; formal signs, natural gestures, fingerspelling, body language, listening, lip-reading and speech. Children in Total Communication programs may wear hearing aids or cochlear implants. In a Total Communication environment, the focus shifts away from a reliance on spoken and written communication to a culture where gestures, body language, signs, symbols, photographs, objects of reference and electronic aids are used in a consistent manner to support speech or as an alternative to speech.



It is an approach to help Children with Hearing Loss communicate effectively and overcome the challenges they are likely to face at home, in school and in other situations, thus paving the way for overall development.

### Different Elements and Benefits of Total Communication Approach

Most learning occurs through interaction with other people. Such learning is possible only when individuals are able to communicate with understanding. Likewise, the quality of the relationship between a child and her or his parents is dependent on the quality of communication existing between them. Thus, the choice of communication modes/methods that will be the most effective and beneficial to a child at home and in the classroom is of utmost importance.

- The main benefit is that it opens all roads and modes of communication for the Children With Hearing Loss
- It has flexibility without eliminating any options.
- It allows Children With Hearing Loss to choose the form that is best for them in a given situation.
- Children With Hearing Loss can exhibit expressive communication.
- Providing an easy method of communication between Children With Hearing Loss and their family, friends and others.
- Children With Hearing Loss are encouraged to use speech and sign language at the same time and also use all other clues for effective communication.
- Getting ideas across with gestures and body language



Research studies have repeatedly demonstrated the beneficial effects of total communication in all areas of development of Children With Hearing Loss, whether psychosocial, linguistic, or academic (Vernon & Andrews, 1990)



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## Who can choose Total Communication Option?

Total Communication may be used by families and educators.

Since over 90% of parents of children who are deaf have hearing themselves, many believe that Total Communication is a philosophy that will allow flexibility without eliminating any of the options. By using a total approach of speaking and signing, all members of the family, those who are deaf as well as those who are hearing, have continuous access to the communication occurring in their environment (Baker, 1992).

Teachers may choose to provide Total Communication options in their classrooms. Those who choose this approach have the responsibility and obligation of acquiring the skills necessary to meet all of the child's communication needs.

### Parents Responsibility

The sign system that is chosen by the family should be learned by at least one member of the family. It is better if all the family learn the system. Thus the child can communicate with the whole family and develop each other's language skills.

For optimum benefits of total communication approach, it is important that parents speak and sign simultaneously. This should become a regular mode of communication with the child. Acceptance of family members towards this approach is extremely important.

As the child's sign language skills develop and become more complex, the family's skills also need to keep pace with the child, to maintain a stimulating language learning environment. The family should also encourage the child to use hearing aids, if it helps the child and creates a listening environment within a natural home setting and provides natural language stimulation.



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## Sundeep Kothari's Journey...

Sundeep Kothari lost his hearing when he was around one year old, due to wrong medicines given by a doctor for his high fever. His parents realized much later that he had lost his hearing when he wouldn't respond to any sound or to their calls.

It worried his parents a lot because they did not know what to do with their deaf child. They went to various doctors with the hope of curing his deafness, but no one could help. Sundeep was admitted to a regular school in Ranchi where he was the only deaf child. A few days of undergoing the traumatic experience of being punished and scolded by the teacher and being bullied by other children got Sundeep so scared that he refused to attend school at all.

Sundeep moved to Kolkata with his mother when he was six years old. He was initially admitted to a special school but his parents were not satisfied with his progress in speech and his studies. His parents took him to Chennai to get him checked by an ENT Specialist. He told them that Sundeep was a healthy child, and it was only his hearing loss that had affected his speech. He advised them to get him a set of hearing aids. Back in Kolkata, he was admitted to The Oral School for Deaf Children in Kolkata which practices Total Communication. This is where Sundeep learnt American Sign Language, took his speech training and completed his secondary education from the National Open School. Sundeep has been using hearing aids since he was six years old, uses speech and Sign Language to communicate.

Sundeep's mother had to learn English and the Sign Language to ensure that both Sundeep and she could understand each other.

At present, Sundeep is working as an Accountant for the Regent Building Developers Group. He is articulate, gentle, talented and a very confident person – an ideal role model for young deaf children and an inspiration for all parents.

He helps VAANI with Sign Language inputs and in conducting Signing Sessions.

Sundeep is married to Payal who is also deaf and practices Total Communication. They have a lovely daughter, Medha who is ten and half years old. She is a hearing child and attends the Birla School. Both Payal and Sundeep communicate with her very effectively.

