

## **Could This Deaf/Hard of Hearing Child Also Have “Something Else Going On”?**

**Christy M. Borders, Associate Dean**

**College of Education**

**Illinois State University**

*The DCDD Board members prepare briefs about topics of interest for our members. As a DCDD member, you are receiving this brief on the topic of resources for professionals who work with students who have communication disorders and/or who are deaf or hard of hearing. We appreciate your continued membership with DCDD! Please feel free to discuss this article on DCDD LinkedIn or Twitter.*

I have received this question via email and phone calls many times over the past 10 years.

While developmental therapists for children who are deaf/hard of hearing (DTH-D/HH) and teachers of the deaf (TOD) may be accustomed to working with students who primarily communicate at lower levels or through behavior, there may be some behaviors that leave parents and professionals scratching their heads. There are many overlapping characteristics, such as delays in socialization and communication skills. The presence of these behaviors across various disabilities makes the distinction difficult.

How many children are we talking about? For several years, the Gallaudet Research Institute (GRI) has reported the prevalence of additional disabilities in school-aged children who are deaf/hard of hearing at approximately 40% (Borders, Bock, Probst, & Kroesch, in press). Along with the overall prevalence, researchers also continue to report the vast array of disabilities displayed (Borders, Bock, Szymanski, 2015; Borders, Bock, & Probst, 2016; Guardino, 2015). The difficulty in assessment has been discussed by many authors and is complicated in populations in which multiple disabilities occur (Bruce & Borders, 2015). One particularly poignant example can be seen in deaf/hard of hearing children who also have autism spectrum disorders (ASD) (Borders, Bock, & Probst, 2016). The triad of impairment typically discussed with ASD (social interaction, communication, and activities/interests or affinities) has overlap with some of the characteristics of deafness. Specifically, delays in social interaction

and communication skills are often characteristic of both. This leaves only affinities/interests as a potential differential distinguishing attribute. What further complicates the issue is that some deaf also children have narrow interests (a characteristic of ASD in the area of activities/interests or affinities). However, for the deaf child this could be based on limited experiences. Children with intellectual delay are also delayed in communication skills, which also mirror a characteristic of deafness. The question of when to refer often baffles DTH-D/HHs and TODs.

A useful resource for parents and professionals is an article entitled “*Red Flags for Developmental Delays in Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing*” by Wiley and Moeller (2008). This cognitively- and linguistically-accessible material clarifies these complications. Specifically, tips are given for some things to look for which are not typically associated with deafness. For example, in the area of sensory integration, the “red flags” of difficulties with self-regulation (hyper- or hypo- reaction to stimuli), postural tone and coordination issues, and sensory defensiveness are all listed with specific examples of the behavior and corresponding next steps. The authors note that the list is a mere starting point, in order to start a conversation with parents and other professionals. Wiley & Moeller (2008) present contrasts between typical and atypical development in the areas of gross motor, sensory integration, receptive and expressive language, and speech. This tool is extremely useful in helping to provide a direction for parents and professionals when delays are noted.

### **References**

Borders, C., Bock, S. J., & Probst, K. (2016). A review of educational practices for deaf/hard of hearing students with comorbid autism. *Deafness & Education International*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/14643154.2016.1255416

Borders, C. M., Bock, S. J., Probst, K. M., & Kroesch, A. M. (in press). Additional disabilities.

In S. Lenihan (Ed.), *E-Book on Deaf Education*.

Borders, C., Bock, S. J., & Szymanski, C. (2015). Teacher ratings of evidence-based practices from the field of autism. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 20(1), 91-100.

doi:10.1093/deafed/enu033

Bruce, S., & Borders, C. (2015). Communication and language in learners who are deaf with additional disabilities: Theories, research, and practice. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 160(4), 368-384. doi:10.1353/aad.2015.0035

Guardino, C. A. (2015). Evaluating teachers' preparedness to work with students who are deaf and hard of hearing with disabilities. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 160(4), 415-426.

doi:10.1353/aad.2015.0030

Wiley, S., & Moeller, P. (2007, January). Red flags for disabilities in children who are deaf/hard of hearing. *ASHA Leader*, 12(1), 8-29. doi: 10.1044/leader.FTR3.12012007.8