



Education Bureau

AS-02E

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Hearing Impairment and Communication



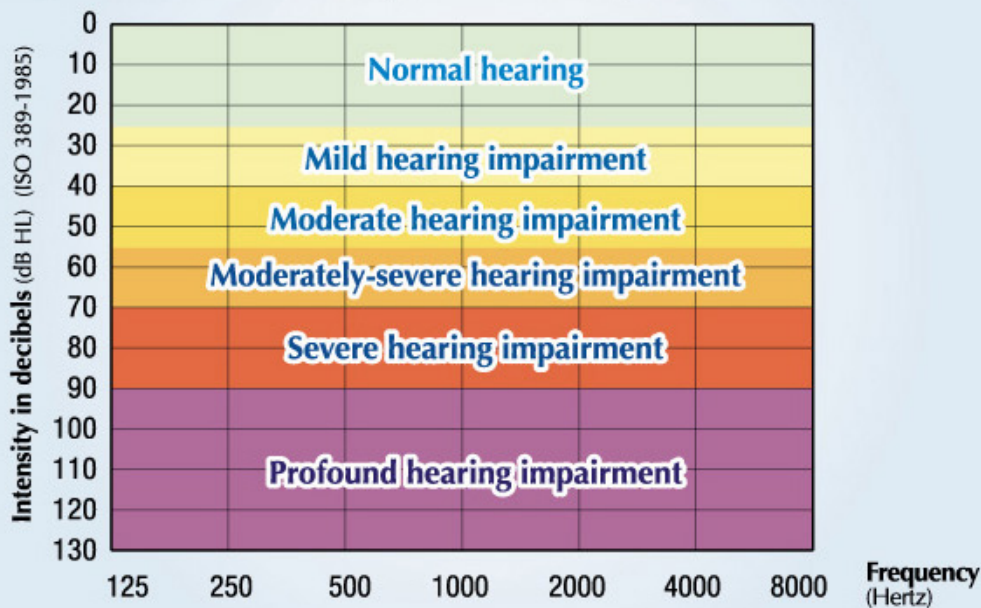
Hearing Impairment and Communication

The auditory system is a very important sensory system. It is our ability to hear that enables us to develop language, communicate and learn new knowledge as we grow up. Different degrees of hearing impairment will have different impacts on communication.



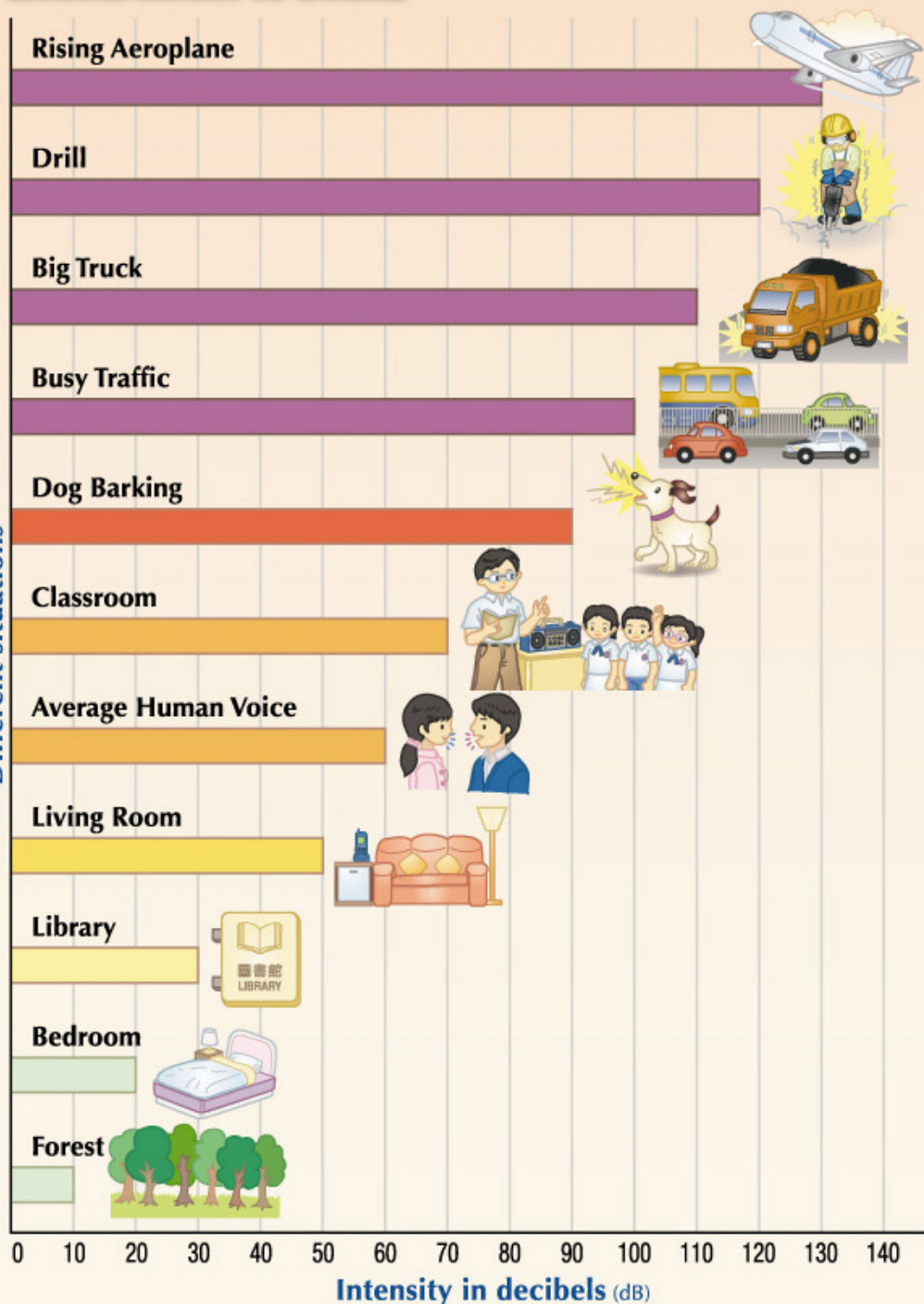
What is hearing impairment?

A person may be said to have a certain degree of hearing impairment if he can only hear sounds of high intensity (over 25 dB HL in general).



Measurement of Sound

Different situations



Relationship between the degree of hearing impairment and communication ability:

Normal hearing (0–25 dB HL)

- If the hearing threshold falls within this range, hearing ability is considered normal



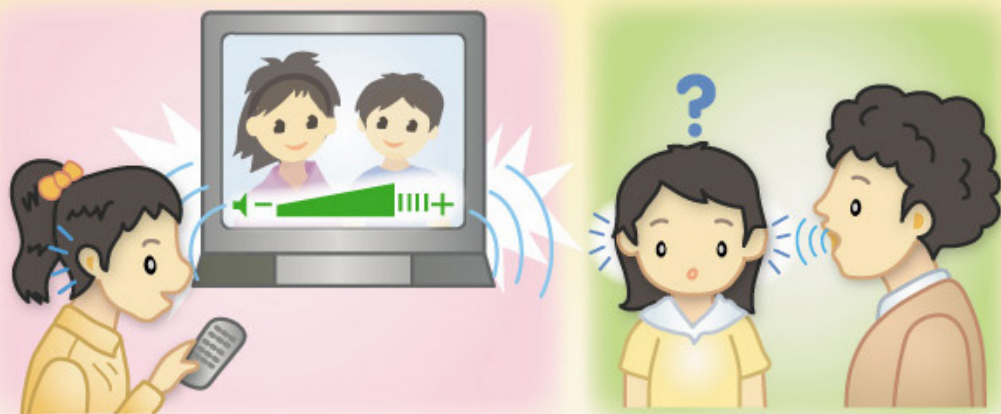
Mild hearing impairment (26–40 dB HL)

- In an environment conducive to hearing, students with mild hearing impairment can still manage to engage in normal conversation
- However, if there are background noises or if the person they talk to speaks rather softly, they will sometimes fail to catch the words
- Delayed speech development and inaccurate pronunciation are often symptoms of mild hearing impairment
- In general, face-to-face communication, appropriate seating arrangement and provision of hearing aids are very helpful to these students in learning and communication



Moderate hearing impairment (41–55 dB HL)

- Students with moderate hearing impairment may find it difficult to engage in normal conversation, especially in a noisy environment
- They may miss part of the message if the speaker is out of his line of vision during classroom discussion
- They often like to turn up the sound of the TV or radio and sometimes fail to hear the mild ringing of a telephone or doorbell
- Delayed speech development, inaccurate pronunciation and learning difficulties are some of the symptoms of moderate hearing impairment
- Persuading these students to wear hearing aids and talking with them face to face are measures that may help them to solve most of the speech and communication problems



Moderately-severe hearing impairment (56–70 dB HL)

- Students with moderately-severe hearing impairment can only hear people talk within a short distance, and rather rely on lip reading for communication
- Have difficulties in listening to tapes and watching TV programmes without subtitles
- Their speech development is hindered and their articulation poor
- In a quiet environment, hearing aids can help them to get the key message of a conversation
- Through appropriate auditory and speech training, they can accurately distinguish speech and correct their pronunciation
- We should speak clearly and use as many visual aids as possible when talking with these students

Severe hearing impairment (71–90 dB HL)

- Students with severe hearing impairment can only hear sounds within a short distance, e.g., drumbeats and honks etc.
- They may find it very difficult to engage in normal conversation
- Have enormous difficulties in listening to tapes and watching TV programmes without subtitles
- Apart from inaccurate pronunciation, they also encounter difficulty in speech development
- With hearing aids and appropriate auditory and speech training, they can still develop speech
- They still have to rely on lip reading for communication even with hearing aids, therefore, when talking with these students, we should look into their face
- Repeat or rephrase our words if they do not understand



Profound hearing impairment (over 90 dB HL)

- Students with profound hearing impairment usually find it very difficult to hear sounds and can sense the vibrations only. They must rely on hearing aids but even so only limited amount of sounds can be heard
- They have severe problems in speech learning
- Even with hearing aids, they still have to rely on lip reading for communication
- Other visual aids such as signs and body language may help them to better understand other people's words
- Auditory and speech training in the early stage is very important
- In general, if hearing aids fail to offer satisfactory help, parents may consider arranging cochlear implant surgery for their children with recommendations from audiologists and otolaryngologists.



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