Supporting deaf children with additional needs

Studies indicate that up to 40% of children with a hearing loss also have additional needs. This could include vision loss, autism, Down syndrome, ADHD, learning difficulties and anxiety. When this happens, it can add complexity, but with the right support, these children can thrive at home and school.

What parents can do:

- **Trust your instincts:** If you notice behaviours that seem different to your child's peers, such as high impulsivity, trouble focusing, or difficulties regulating emotions, speak to your GP or paediatrician. Hearing loss may mask or mimic other conditions, so it's important to explore all possibilities.
- **Make sure professionals consider your child's hearing needs:** Assessment tools or therapy approaches may need to be adapted. Share with your team how your child best communicates - whether that be through sign, speech, visuals or a combination of methods.
- **Be patient with communication differences:** Children with additional needs may find turn-taking, waiting, or staying still challenging. Allow for breaks, repetition, and routines to support understanding and reduce frustration.
- **Collaborate with your team:** Teachers of the Deaf, psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, paediatricians, orientation & mobility specialists, and occupational therapists can all work together to create consistent strategies across home and school. Share what works well and ask for adjustments that meet your child's specific needs.
- **Focus on strengths:** Many deaf children with additional needs are creative, energetic, and full of curiosity. Encourage their interests and celebrate progress, not perfection.
- **Build your support network:** Connect with other parents of deaf children with additional needs through online groups, local services, or organisations like Aussie Deaf Kids. You're not alone.

Supporting a child with hearing loss and another diagnosis can be a challenge. But with the right support and understanding, you can help your child grow in confidence and independence.