

What Children Do and Do Not Like about Taking Part in Sport: Using Focus Groups to Investigate Thoughts and Feelings of Children with Hearing Loss

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Abstract : Limited participation in physical activity and sport has been linked to poorer mental and physical health in children. Studies have shown that children who participate in sports benefit from improved social skills, self-confidence, communication skills and a better quality of life. Children who participate in sport are also more likely to continue their participation into their adult life. Deaf or hard of hearing children should have the same opportunities to participate in sport and receive the benefits as their hearing peers. Anecdotal evidence suggests this isn't always the case. This is concerning given there are 45,000 children in the UK with permanent hearing loss. The aim of this study was to understand what encourages or discourages deaf or hard of hearing children to take part in sports. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Nottingham School of Medicine ethics committee. We conducted eight focus groups with deaf or hard of hearing children aged 10 to 15 years. A total of 45 children (19 male, 26 female) recruited from local schools and sports clubs took part. Information was gathered on the children's thoughts and feelings about participation in sport. This included whether they played sports and who with, whether they did or did not like sport, and why they got involved in sport. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. Several key themes were identified as being associated with levels of sports participation. These included friendships, family and communication. Deaf or hard of hearing children with active siblings had participated in more sports. Communication was a common theme throughout regardless of the type of hearing-assistive technology a child used. Children found communication easier during sport if they were allowed to use their technology and had particular difficulty during sports such as swimming. Children expressed a desire not to have to identify themselves at a club as having a hearing loss. This affected their confidence when participating in sport. Not surprisingly, children who are deaf or hard of hearing are more likely to participate in sport if they have a good support network of parents, coaches and friends. The key barriers to participation for these children are communication, lack of visual information, lack of opportunity and a lack of awareness. By addressing these issues more deaf and hard of hearing children will take part in sport and will continue their participation.

Keywords : barrier, children, deaf, participation, hard of hearing, sport

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