



# Peer Support for Deaf Parents

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Edited for plain language by Katie Johnson and  
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## Introduction

There are 1 million Deaf adults in the United States. Deaf adults usually use American Sign Language and are a part of the Deaf community.

When Deaf adults get healthcare, they often face communication challenges. Many healthcare providers don't use American Sign Language. Because of this, Deaf adults often get worse care. Deaf adults have less basic health information, including health information about their children. When we exclude Deaf parents, they miss out on important parenting information.

## What Did We Do?

We held virtual support groups for Deaf parents. The groups allowed parents to learn from each other. The program is called Parents Empowering Parents. The goal of the program is to increase Deaf parents' support and knowledge related to parenting.

We made flyers and videos in American Sign Language to get parents to join the support group. Each parent went to at least three support groups using Zoom. A Deaf doctor and a Deaf counselor led the groups.

Each group began with the ground rules:

1. What's Said Here, Stays Here — Don't repeat what's said in the group to anyone outside of the group.
2. Privacy — No one has to answer a question or do an activity they don't want to do.
3. Dignity — Respect what other parents think or have experienced. Don't bully or treat the other parents badly.

4. Responsibilities — Listen carefully and don't interrupt. Create a safe space where everyone can share.



Please repeat this to yourself:

*I am not here to judge.*

*I am here to connect with and support other parents.*

*I understand that if at any time I break the above rules, I will be asked to leave the support group.*

*Ground rules announced at the parents sessions reminded parents not to judge other parents but to connect with and support them.*

## What Did the Support Groups Talk About?

The group meetings focused on education, social support, and building parent confidence. Parents learned about parenting skills, childcare, and children's healthcare. The support group used the [ParentingWell](#) approach. The ParentingWell approach uses family-focused conversations in healthcare settings.

The group leaders asked:

*Where are your children living?*

*What does help with childcare look like for your family?*

*How does your family communicate?*

*How has raising a family changed your health or wellbeing?*



*Parents were asked some questions about their parenting and home life and about what they might need.*

## How Did the Support Groups Work?

The support groups happened over Zoom using either the chat box or the video camera. Half of the Deaf parents were in a group that used video call for the support group. They would use sign language to communicate. The other half of Deaf parents only used the chat box. They used written English to communicate.



*Parents were assigned randomly to either support sessions held by Zoom video (see on the left side above) or to support sessions held by Zoom chat, without the video turned on (see on the right side).*

37 Deaf parents joined the program. 27 Deaf parents joined at least three of the support groups. Most of the parents participating were white. We reached out to more parents so there would be more Black and brown parents in the program. The

last support group was entirely parents of color. Across all four of the support groups, there were 2 male and 25 female participants.

## What Did We Learn?

A lot of parents attended the support groups. Since parents kept joining, we know that virtual support groups could work. Participants said they were able to connect with and learn from other Deaf parents. It didn't make a difference if the parents used the chat box or if they used a video camera for the support group.

After joining the support group, parents said:

“It was a good mix of younger and older kids, so I was able to relate to the experiences other parents had.”

“I had imagined a more stable group so my expectations were not met there but I also liked being able to talk to different moms about different topics so it is more about what the expectations are.”

“I was interested, learning more about the next stage and what to expect then.”

The Parents Empowering Parents program seems to be a good program for Deaf parents. The support groups created connection and support for Deaf parents. The support groups seem to work over Zoom. Parents joined many support groups, so this program seems to work for Deaf parents. We need more research to know if participants had more knowledge and support.





## Credit

Based on research done by Mike McKee, Jess Cuculick, Jessica Contreras, and Tiffany Panko.

### How to Cite This Brief

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