

Revisiting the “90% Rule”: Hearing status of parents of deaf children in the UK

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Introduction

The commonly-cited estimate that 90% of deaf children have hearing parents is largely based on older, non-UK research, limiting its contemporary and geographical relevance.

The 2026 edition of the National Deaf Children's Society's annual *Deaf Children Today* survey included questions on parental hearing status to give a more contemporary impression of these figures in a UK context.

Methodology

Previous research has often categorised parental hearing status in overly binary terms, typically distinguishing between parents as either deaf or hearing, with little room for the nuances that may define a person's hearing status better.

In the Deaf Children Today survey, all 594 survey respondents from different parts of the UK were presented with the question, “Are you deaf yourself?” The following answers were given as options.

- a) I am hearing.
- b) I have a hearing loss.
- c) I am deaf and mainly use spoken language.
- d) I am deaf and mainly use British Sign Language (BSL) or another sign language.
- e) I am deaf and routinely use both.

They were also presented with the question ‘Is your child's other parent deaf?’ The same answer options were presented in the third person.

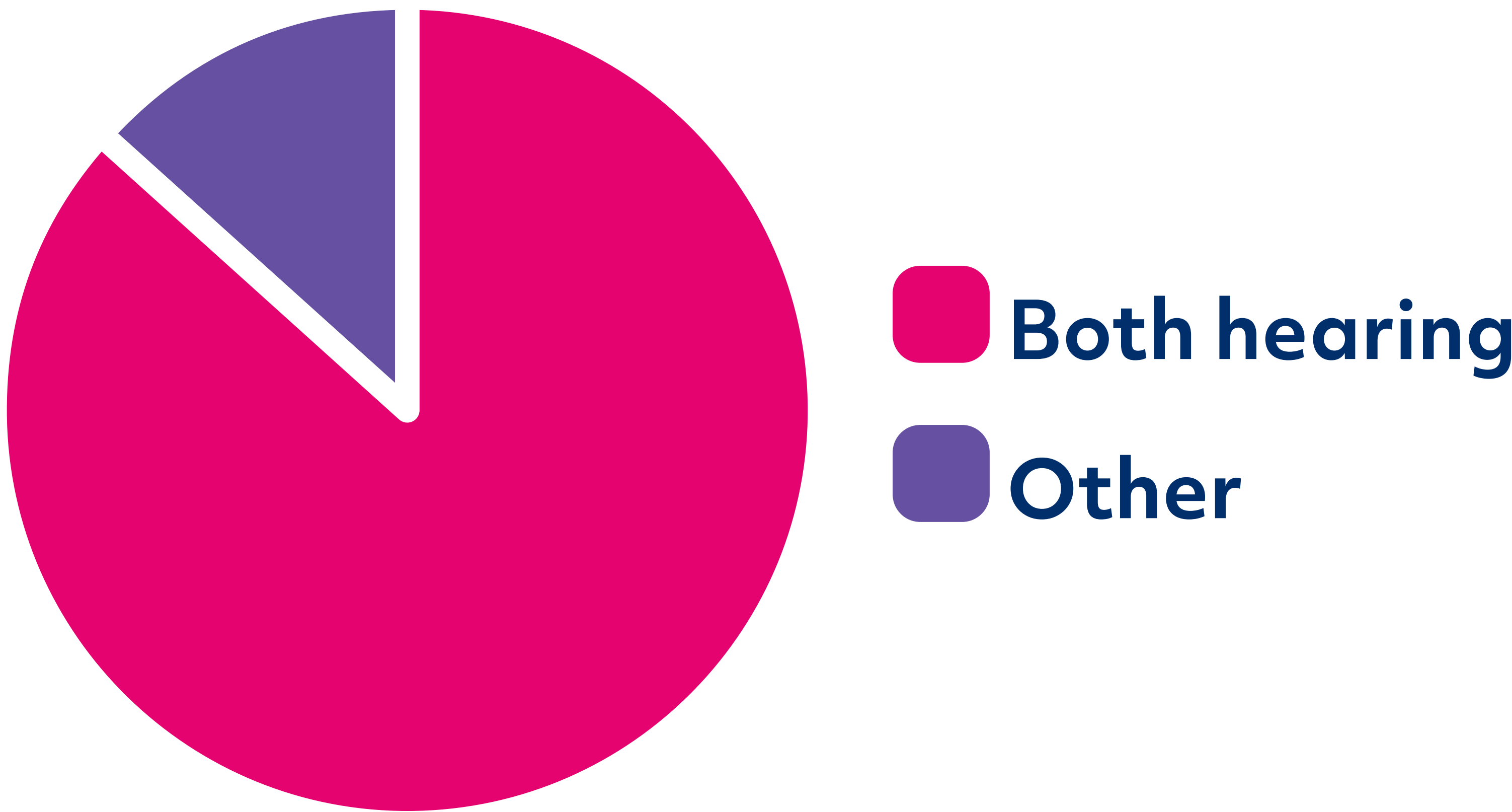
Results

452 respondents shared information on both parents' hearing status.

Of those, **392** shared that both they and the child's other parent are hearing.

Based on this data, and recognising the relatively small sample size, survey findings indicate that:

In the UK,
86.7%
of deaf children have
two hearing parents.



11.1% of respondents shared that one of their child's parents has a level of deafness while the other identifies as hearing.

1.8% of respondents shared that both parents identify as deaf.