

# Dinner Table Syndrome

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Father of three grown children, all on the autism spectrum, and grandfather to four. He has worked with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for four years. Jeremy holds a Bachelor's degree in International Studies, a Master's degree in International Development, and a minor in Government.







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Sakura has worked for NCDHH for a little over 1 year, but her connection to the agency goes back almost 15 years. She has provided training related to trauma, mental health and wellness and recovery to thousands across the state. She has been featured in several national and international publications and media interviews. When not trying to rid the world of violence and injustice, Sakura chills at home with her pets: 4 axolotls, lots of snails, 1 cat and 1 husband. She is also learning to navigate parenting a teenager in 2025.



# Purpose of This Session



**Participants should leave this session with a clear understanding of:**



What Dinner Table Syndrome looks like.

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The impact of Dinner Table Syndrome.

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How to reduce incidents of Dinner Table Syndrome.


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# Dinner Table Syndrome

**We will begin this session with a small role play where three people are sitting at a table or standing in a group.**

 Two of them are using ASL (no voice).

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 The third person is trying to understand what is being communicated and after a little bit of confusion, the person begins to isolate themselves and walk away from the other two, visibly upset.

# Dinner Table Syndrome

The American Society for Deaf Children explains Dinner Table Syndrome as:

***“A term used to describe the isolation Deaf/Hard of Hearing children (and adults) often feel when surrounded by hearing people, whether non-signing or signing, leading to exclusion from conversations and interactions at the dinner table.”***

The reference to a dinner table is a metaphor for other societal situations such as the playground, classroom, in the car or even at the theater.



Deaf/HH Population: **11 Million**  
About **1 Million** Profoundly Deaf



**90%** **BORN TO  
HEARING  
PARENTS**

# What We Know



Only 22% of hearing parents with deaf children learn sign language (ASL, PSE, SEE).

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75% of deaf children are not exposed to Deaf Culture until AFTER high school.

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Beliefs, stigma, shame/guilt, lack of support system can contribute to parents NOT seeking resources.

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As a result, deaf children experience decreased mental health, stunted cognitive development, poor academic performance and employment difficulties.

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# What Does Dinner Table Syndrome Look Like?




-  Feeling or (in some cases, physically) isolated from the rest of the group/family.

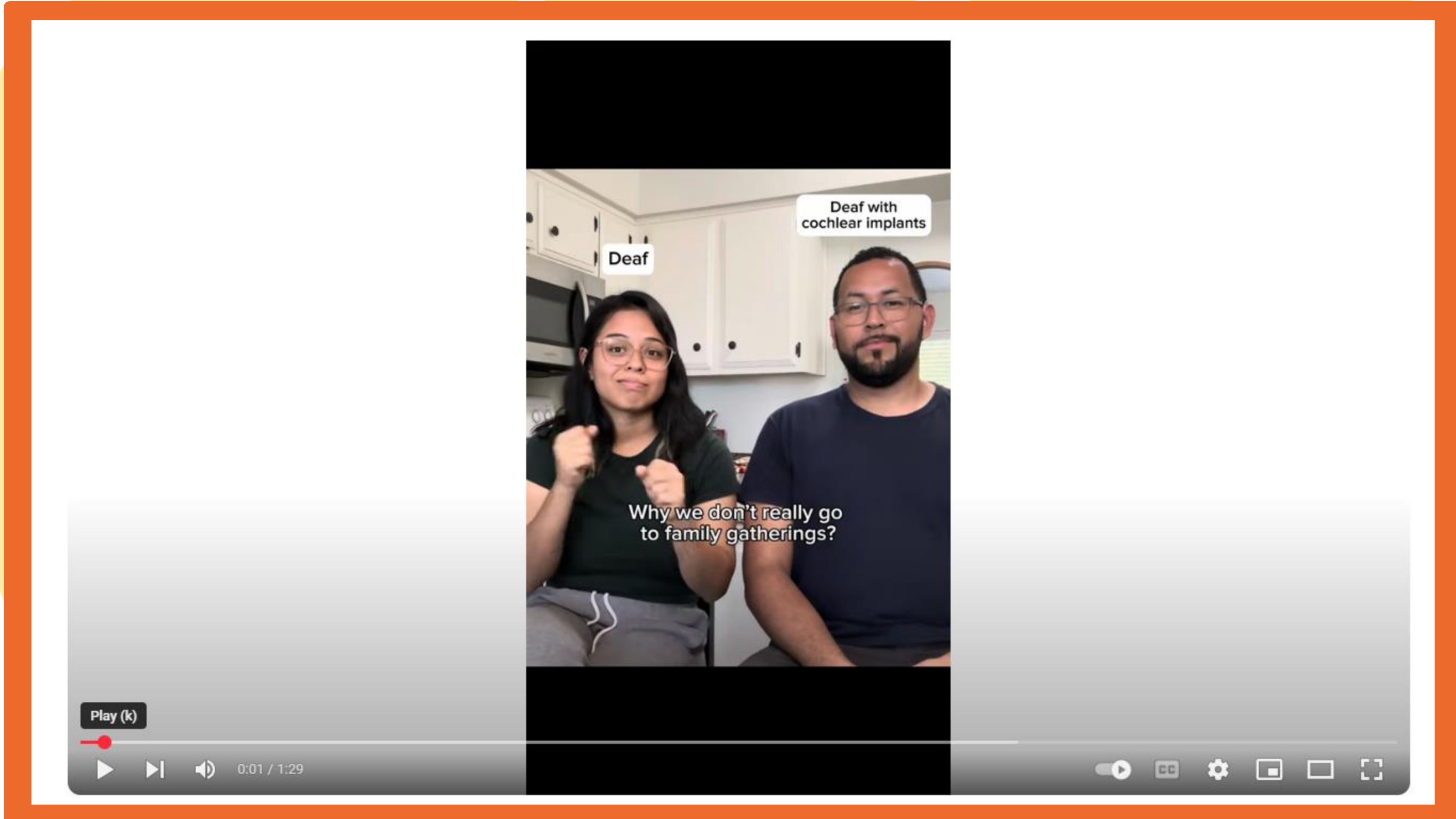
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-  Students from deaf schools/college do not want to go home during weekends or holidays.

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-  No one in family or group knows sign language, costs them the connections between parent and D/HH child.





# Other Contributing Factors

 Limited “family” time.

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 Parents/caregiver works outside the home.

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 Children attend school.

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 Stigma (real or perceived).

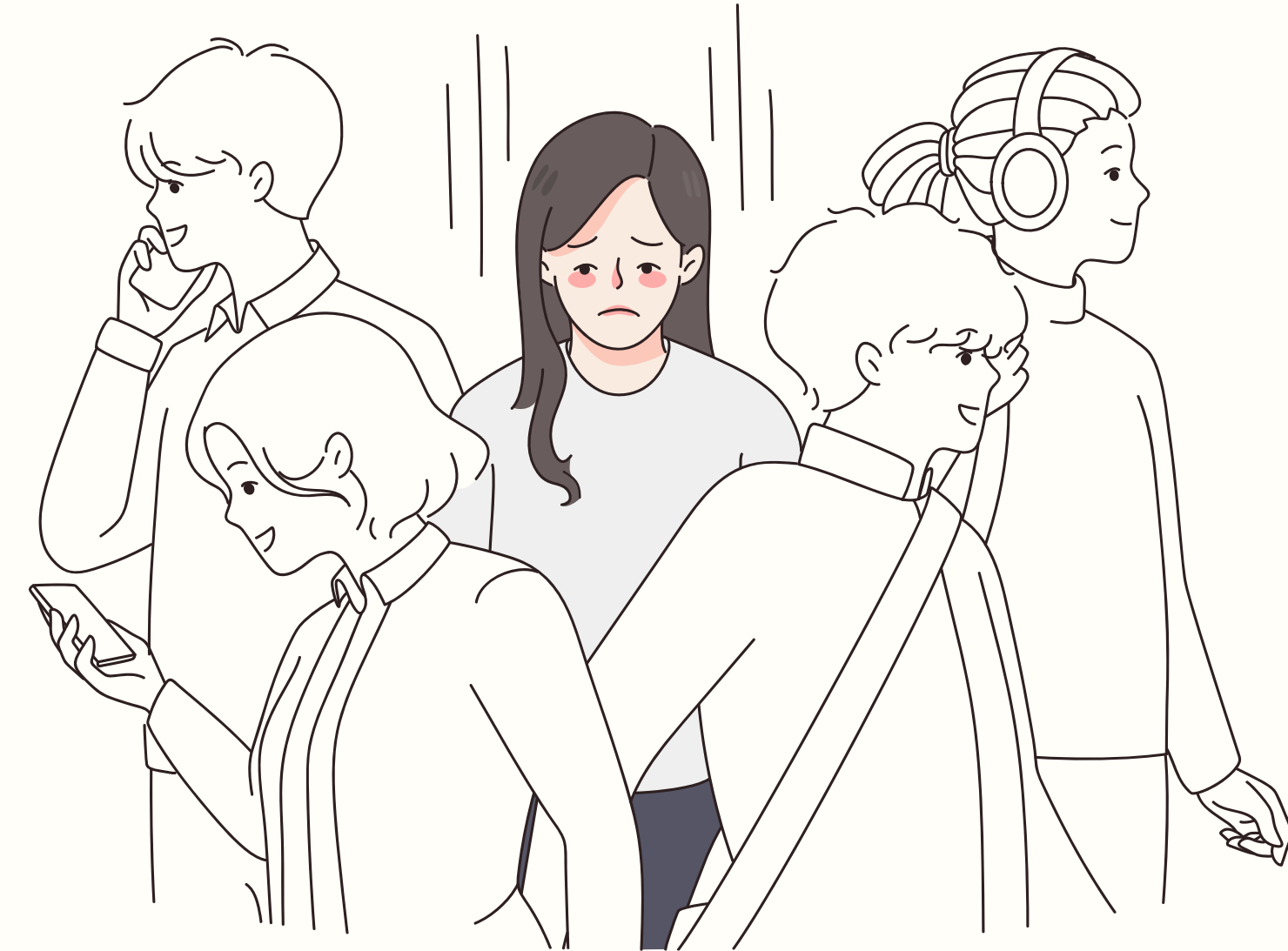
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 Limited knowledge of resources and support available in the community.

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 Limited access to resources and support system (for the parents AND child).

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# Impacts of Dinner Table Syndrome




 Delayed emotional and social skills development.

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 Delay in language skills and comprehension in reading, writing, and spelling.

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 Lifelong struggles with mental and physical health, addiction, behavior.

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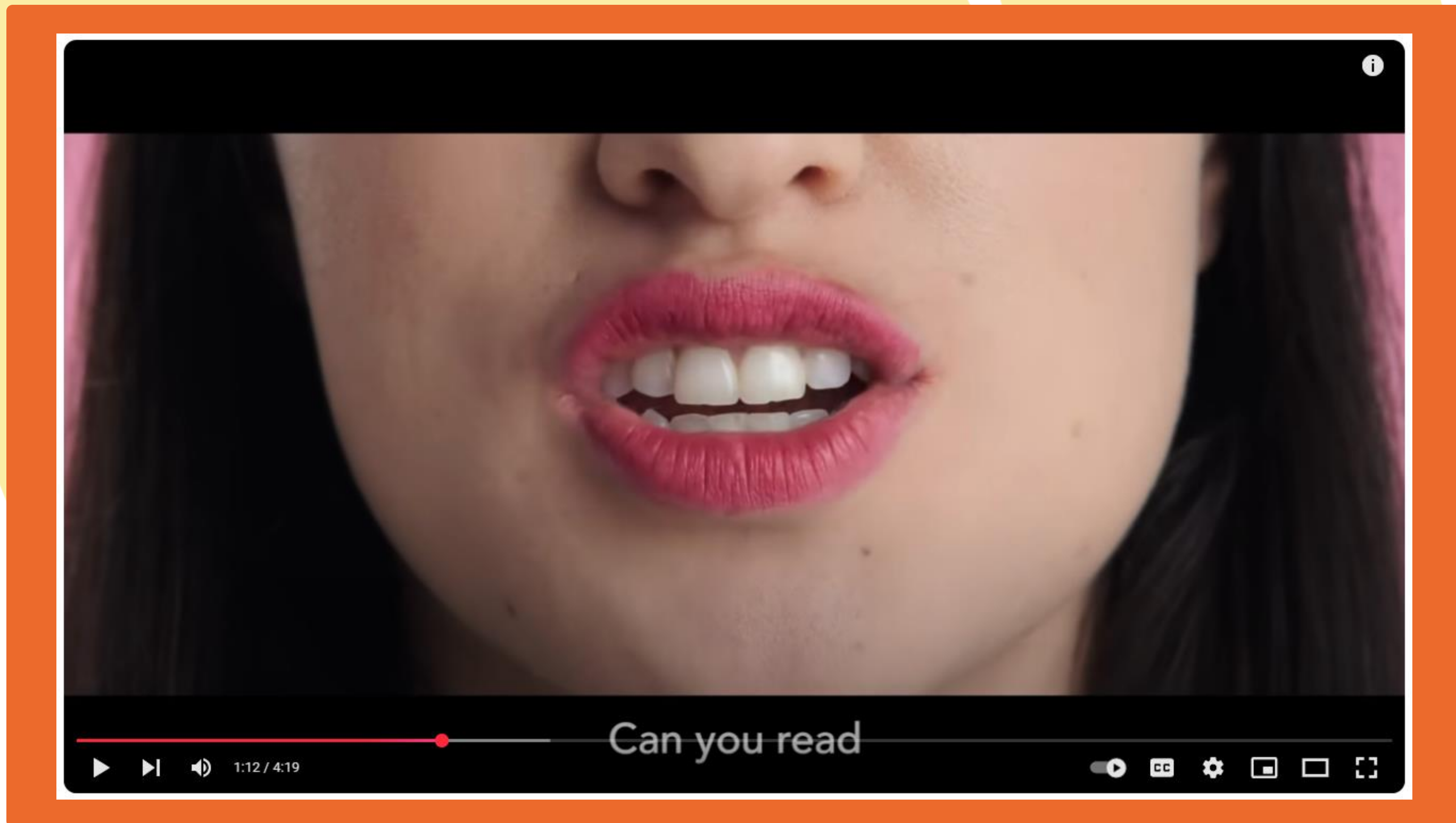
 Increase in vulnerability to bullying, abuse, manipulation.

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 Feeling isolated and alone; not worthy; invisible.



# But Can't They Just Lip Read?



# How Can We **Reduce** Dinner Table Syndrome?



Educate yourself.



Include the child in family and social settings and activities.



Be inclusive.



Be mindful of speaking habits.




Develop a way to communicate in the family.




Accessible games and activities for D/HH individuals.




# References and Sources

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