

Tips for Communicating with Deaf Individuals

- 1. Visibility:** good lighting, appropriate distance for lip reading, ensuring we have our glasses on or contacts in, not having the sun or a bright light behind you.
- 2. Lip Reading:** speak normally, don't over enunciate, enunciate properly (no mumbling), face the person, and make sure they are looking at you, if you are a fast speaker, slow down a little, trim the facial hair so we can see your lips (or better yet be clean shaven), keep hands and objects away from the face/mouth as they are very distracting, don't talk while chewing food or gum. Don't whisper or speak too loudly, as we are distracted by that, and prefer normal speech volume. Do so if required if needing to be quiet, or in a noisy environment.
- 3. Body Positioning:** position yourself where you can be lipread, heard (within the normal range of spatial proximity, three feet), sit down if needed, do not speak behind the person. In a restaurant, when possible, position yourself that what you say, gets directed to the Deaf or HOH person, rather than to an empty void. (Not easy, but at least try!)
- 4. Noise:** be aware of background noise and eliminate it where possible, by turning down or muting the stereo, TV, or relocating to a quieter setting if possible. If noise cannot be eliminated, be prepared to repeat, either a word or the full sentence. Or better yet, sign, finger spell, or write down what you are trying to say. Speak up if needed.
- 5. Gesturing & Body Movement:** reduce gesturing while talking and stay still if possible, don't move around while talking because doing so means lip reading is harder and we become distracted by your actions. If you must move around because you are demonstrating something, then be prepared to explain again, or break it down into segments. Keep your head up so that your mouth is visible. Give eye contact.
- 6. Repeat:** repetition is often necessary. When you are asked to, please do not be frustrated, or change the words you used, and do not dumb down or simplify what you are saying, unless it's asked, or needs to be age appropriate for a child. We will often tell you if it is a word we missed or the whole thing, so repeat back only what we ask for. Speak up if you are a quiet speaker. A note: a single syllable word is harder to lipread and decipher than a multisyllabic word, so if one must change a word, use a multisyllabic one instead.
- 7. Timing:** timing is crucial, and this holds for everyone. If we are actively doing something, either wait until we are finished, or get our attention and ask us to stop if it's important and we are able to do so. Also give us time to process what has been said, stop periodically to check to see if we have comprehended what you have said.
- 8. Attention:** ensure you have our attention, by making sure we are looking at you and aware that we are being spoken to, tap the person on the shoulder, stand in front, eliminate distractions, and even ask if we are ready, if we have been interrupted from something. Please don't wave your hand in front of our face, it is rude. Eye contact is essential between both of you.
- 9. Sign language:** learn and use sign language if your family member, partner, or friend requires it. We understand if you make mistakes, we will help you learn, and we also understand if you

aren't proficient. The effort, and caring behind it is appreciated. If in a customer service or emergency service field, it is crucial to know at least a rudimentary amount of signs so that you can at least convey something to the individual.

10. Assumptions: do not assume we are following every word, or understood every word simply because we are looking at you, actively participating, saying yes, or responding appropriately. Sometimes we are just guessing or faking it. Don't assume that because we don't respond, that we are ignoring you, snubbing you, snobbish, or don't want to talk to you (although sometimes that is true!). Just because we get part of the conversation does not mean we get it all. Sometimes one word missed derails the rest of the conversation, or we become distracted and miss key elements of the conversation. Ask if we understood, clarify what we think we heard. Most of us do this by habit, but often, we also don't like to admit when we didn't understand something.

11. Understand: that like anyone else, if we are ill, tired, distracted by our children or environment, that we are affected by things we cannot always control or eliminate, just like you. If these things affect your own abilities to communicate effectively, then understand it is doubly difficult for us to overcome these as well. No one is always at their best, and that always impacts successful communication. Also understand that sometimes, no matter how hard we try to focus, or participate, the BRAIN will simply shut down and say it has had enough. We will tell you if we are having a bad communication day, and why.

12. Instead of phoning, use text, email, instant messaging, Facebook, etc to contact the Deaf or HOH individual.

Please Do Not Say the Following:

Here is an absolute DON'T: if we completely miss part of a conversation, or join in late;

- ~Never mind
- ~it wasn't/isn't important
- ~it's not about you
- ~we're done talking about it
- ~or other similar and RUDE, DISRESPECTFUL statements

All that does is make us feel left out, unimportant; too much trouble to be worth repeated, or included; and it hurts our feelings!

Important Facts about Deaf Individuals

Most of us are active in communicating what our needs are, or what we have missed. It is equally important to listen to what we say, and try to employ those strategies for us.

Some of us can hear with our hearing aids, or cochlear implants, but it doesn't mean that we hear like a normal person. We don't, and never will. If we aren't wearing our hearing aids, or sound processor, then take additional time and effort to aid us in communicating what you say. Wait for us to put them on, or if we can't due to an infection, migraine, cold, or they've been sent off for repair (not everyone has a backup), or the battery is dead, or it's malfunctioning suddenly, be extra patient and considerate, because at those times, we are even more at a disadvantage.

Lip reading is an amazingly ineffective way of communicating. It's estimated that lipreaders can understand only 30% of the conversation taking place. That's like missing two of every three words being spoken! In situations where the Deaf person is familiar with the speaker or the conversation is easily predictable (such as at a check-out stand) comprehension goes up to 60%, but that's still almost every other word missing from the exchange.

There are at least 70 signed languages existing in the world at this time, that we know of, and all of them are incredibly distinct. American Sign Language is used in the United States, parts of Canada, and some South American countries, and has loose relations to French Sign Language (much like French and Italian are related). British Sign Language is completely different and BSL signers and ASL signers are as incomprehensible to one another as German speakers and Italian speakers.

An average reading level of 3rd grade is typical of graduates of deaf education programs in the U.S.

Many Deaf people actually like being deaf. They consider it more peaceful than being able to hear everything all the time. Most Deaf people I've talked to also feel like the majority of hearing people are insensitive and oblivious. They don't want to belong to a community like that.

Deaf people drive cars all the time. In fact, some studies have shown that Deaf people are actually better drivers than Hearing people due to the fact that Deaf people have enhanced peripheral vision. If you think about it, nothing about driving really requires you to be able to hear. After all, there's a reason emergency vehicles have both sirens *and* lights.

Braille is a writing system where each letter is represented by a series of raised dots. This makes it so that *Blind* people can read, even if they can't see. There's some scientific evidence that Deaf people see better than hearing people. They're just fine reading the regular way.

A small minority of deaf students complete deaf education programs prepared for independence in adulthood; 60% face either unemployment or severe underemployment.

Deaf individuals earn only 50% to 70% of what their hearing peers earn, losing an average of \$320,000 in earnings during their lifetime.

Over 50% of deaf adults earn less than \$25,000 per year.

42% of deaf adults between 18 to 44 years of age are unemployed.

70% of deaf individuals rely on government insurance programs such as Medicaid and Medicare.

Effective communication takes all participants actively working to communicate effectively.