



DEAFNESS AND HARD OF HEARING

Rarely is a person completely deaf, and a hearing loss could fall anywhere along the continuum from totally deaf to partial hearing. The amount of usable (or residual) hearing varies greatly from person to person. Depending upon the type of loss, the person may or may not benefit from the amplification that a hearing aid provides. Hearing aids only amplify sound; they do not make sound clearer. The severity of a person's hearing loss could be different at various frequencies. Therefore, ability to hear different voices will vary depending on a number of factors, including the pitch of the voice. Also, it is important to note that a person's ability to hear a voice is different than the ability to discriminate between sounds and to understand speech.

Deafness is caused by many factors. Some causes are preventable while others are not.

- A large number of people with hearing disabilities are born deaf because of hereditary factors. Ninety percent of inherited deafness occurs in families with hearing parents.
- Children can be born deaf due to maternal diseases such as rubella or the side-effects of certain drugs. Immunization against rubella is critical to preventing prenatal deafness.
- At birth, extreme prematurity anoxia (lack of oxygen) or physical damage can cause deafness.
- Childhood diseases such as scarlet fever, meningitis, and measles cause deafness less often than in the past.
- Severe ear infections, accidents, and the side effects of massive dosages of certain drugs are other causes of deafness.
- Noise pollution, especially industrial noise, is becoming an increasingly frequent source of hearing loss.
- Later in life, the primary causes of deafness are noise and aging.

The life activity most affected by hearing loss is communication. Colleagues and friends must be versatile in finding an effective communication method. Pen and paper are handy communication devices in some situations. Although you want to avoid gross or exaggerated arm waving, pantomime is helpful. Be aware that if you point to an object or area during a conversation with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, that person will most likely turn to look at where you are pointing. Allow their gaze to return to you before continuing with what you are saying. Though not effective for all people who are hearing impaired, knowing some sign language and finger spelling is helpful. Learn some elementary or survival signs from colleagues, co-workers, or managers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing, like people who are hearing, have different education levels. Knowledge of English grammar, syntax, and spelling varies from individual to individual. A person who uses American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language of communication may or may not be proficient in using Standard English. For the most



part, English is an oral/aural language designed to be spoken and heard. Therefore, it is quite challenging to learn and understand English when you cannot hear, especially when it varies so greatly from the structure and syntax of ASL. The person who is not proficient in English is not stupid or illiterate; he or she just uses a different language to communicate.

Interactions: Communication Considerations

Attention Getters

Getting the attention of someone who is deaf or hard of hearing can vary depending on the person and the situation. If the person has enough residual hearing to pick up a verbal cue, calling their name is quite appropriate. When this does not work and the person is within reach, a light tap on the shoulder or lightly placing your hand on their shoulder works well. A heavy touch and rapid tapping is used to indicate urgency, such as during an emergency. For people out of arms reach, you can ask someone closer to the person to tap them on the shoulder, or you can wave your hand and arm in the air. Sometimes hitting your foot on the floor repetitively or lightly pounding on a table are used. The latter works especially well when the person who is hearing impaired is leaning on the table. For getting the attention of large groups, simply flash the lights in the room on and off several times at a slow and steady pace. This works well in mixed groups of deaf and hearing people. Again, rapidly flashing the lights indicates an emergency.

Lip Reading

Not all hearing impaired people are good lip readers and lip reading skill has no correlation to a person's intelligence. Even good lip readers may miss many words. Keep in mind that only 25-30% of spoken English can be lip read. Not all deaf people know how to speak sign language, or choose to use sign language interpreters. Some prefer to communicate through lip reading and some prefer sign language. When a person is reading your lips, enunciate clearly, but do not yell or over enunciate your words, as you will distort your lip movements and also look very foolish. Remove objects from your mouth such as cigarettes, pipes, gum, chewing tobacco, or food. Keep your hands or any other objects from covering your mouth. A beard or mustache may interfere with a lip reader's ability to read your lips. Try to sit with a light source in front of you, not behind you (such as a window).

Speech

Many deaf and hard of hearing people have voices that are easily understood. Others cannot monitor the volume and tone of their speech and may be initially hard to understand. If a person is speaking for themselves and you do not understand their speech, it is appropriate for you to ask them to repeat or even to write down what is being said. Ask in a respectful, not condescending manner. Deaf people, like hearing people, vary to some degree in their communication skills.

Sign Language

For many people who speak sign language, American Sign Language (ASL) is the first language that they may acquire and use. ASL is a recognized language with a unique syntax, grammar, and structure. It is not a form of English. Other people who use sign language that



is not ASL use one of the manual codes for English that combines some of the vocabulary of ASL signs with some of the grammar and syntax of English.

Persons With Deafness And Hearing Impairments In The Workplace

Technology And Adaptive Devices

Sign Language Interpreters

The need for an interpreter depends on the situation and the people involved. Interpreters can be described as a communication link. A telephone, for example, is a communication link; it does not add information or alter the content of the message.

Do not refer to a deaf person as deaf and dumb. Many deaf people have the ability to speak orally. Deafness does not, in itself, affect intelligence. Some people prefer to voice for themselves, even with a sign language interpreter present. In addition, in conversation it is not necessary to avoid using the words or phrases like hear or sounds good with a deaf person.

The Function of the Interpreter is to:

- Allow more direct communication
- Improve communication accuracy and avoid misunderstandings
- Decrease frustrations
- Raise the "comfort level" of those interacting
- Facilitate more complete communication, so that both individuals feel free to ask questions and offer more in-depth explanations
- Save time
- Make clear any non-verbal communication

How to Work with a Sign Language Interpreter

The interpreter makes communication possible between persons separated by different language modes. Listed below are some tips on how to work with an interpreter.

First, remember the interpreter's role is to facilitate communication. It is inappropriate for you to address him/her directly. Maintain eye contact with the deaf person, not with the interpreter. Allow the interpreter to position themselves near you as this will allow the deaf person to watch the interpreter and your expressions as needed. Address the deaf person directly, avoid phrases such as, "ask her this...", or "tell him to . . ." Talk through, not to, the interpreter.

A Code of Ethics that requires him/her to interpret everything communicated, whether it be signed or spoken, binds the interpreter. This includes any phone calls or comments you make in the deaf person's presence. It is inappropriate for you to request the interpreter to keep anything from the deaf person. In situations of a serious nature, the use of a deaf person's close friend or family member as an interpreter may be considered inappropriate. To Request a Sign Language Interpreter



If you would like to request a Sign Language Interpreter, contact your local Open Door Group Office or Westcoast Association of Visual Language Interpreters www.wavli.com

Phone Calls

Relay services establish communication between hearing people who use voice phones and people with hearing or speech impairments who use Telecommunication Devices for Deaf (TTY). If you wish to contact a deaf person call Telus Relay at 1-800-855-0511 and give the operator the deaf person's TTY (Teletypewriter) number. If you are deaf and trying to contact a voice number with your TTY, call the TTY number and give the operator the voice number.

The relay operator will be using both the telephone and the TTY while relaying communication between the deaf person and the hearing person. The hearing person needs to speak at a slower than normal pace in order for the operator to be able to keep up while typing. The hearing person also will need to say "GA" or (Go Ahead) to inform the operator to let the deaf person know it is their turn to speak. There may be periods of silence while the operator waits for the TTY-user to finish a complete thought before the operator speaks it into the phone. It is important to be patient and to recognize that typing takes longer than talking. If you are unaccustomed to using a telephone relay service, the relay operator will be most happy to assist you in using it respectfully.

Strobe Lights

An employer should strongly consider adding strobe lights to the existing emergency system, or perhaps supplying hearing-impaired employees with a vibrating pager that goes off in times of alarm.

Computer Technology

E-Mail, Instant Messaging, and Internet Chat provide effective means of communication in today's workplace for individuals who have no hearing impairment. They are just as effective for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Speech recognition software may also be used effectively in one-to-one communication situations. Similar to dictation, the software records your speech and displays it on a computer screen.

Assistive Listening Devices (Alds)

ALDs are designed to help hearing-impaired individuals in specific listening situations. Some amplify television, while others amplify public speakers. Comparatively, hearing aids amplify all sound and can be used in all listening situations. However, as it is an all-purpose instrument, it may not be as successful in specific locations as an ALD.

Augmentative Communication Devices

Communication devices provide communication access to people who have speech or hearing impairments. By typing words and sentences or touching pictorial symbols, someone with no speech or limited speech can utilize a synthesized voice or symbols to communicate. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing can use communication devices to communicate



using either text or pictures. These devices can range from low-tech cards and pictures to palm-pilot type electronic devices.

Possible Accommodations For Individuals Who Are Hard Of Hearing (From The Job Accommodation Network)

Communicating One On One:

- Use written notes
- Use computer technology, i.e., e-mail and instant messaging
- Provide an assistive listening device (ALD)
- Provide an interpreter
- Provide basic sign language training
- Provide an augmentative communication device
- Provide a TTY

Communicating In Groups, Meetings, Or Training:

- Provide an assistive listening device (ALD)
- Provide communication access real-time translation (CART)
- Provide computer-assisted note taking
- Address environmental factors, i.e., background noise, lighting, and positioning
- Provide an interpreter
- Use Web-based meeting software or video conferencing
- Provide standard note taking or other text information
- Allow tape recording of meetings
- Provide speech recognition software

Communicating Over The Telephone:

- Provide amplification
- Adjust sound frequency to improve clarity
- Provide a headset designed for people who wear hearing aids
- Reduce background noise
- Provide a TTY line/phone on site
- Provide speech recognition

Communicating With Workers In The Field:

- Use a two-way radio
- Use a portable TTY system
- Use a paging device
- Use a portable computer

Responding To Emergency Alarms:

- Provide visual or tactile alerting device
- Implement a buddy system

Responding To Other Sounds In The Environment:

- Provide auditory signal software to replace computer sounds



- Allow the use of a hearing dog
- Provide a visual or tactile signal

Dealing With Extraneous Noises:

- Provide sound absorbing panels and carpeting
- Prohibit the use of personal radios
- Separate the workstation from noisy equipment

Working Safely Around Vehicles And Heavy Equipment:

- Establish paths of travel for forklifts, vehicles, and heavy equipment
- Install flashing lights and mirrors on forklifts and vehicles
- Invite the person with hearing loss to wear a hard hat or colored vest
- Use a vibrating one-touch pager
- Install a portable CCTV in the forklift

Wearing Hearing Protection:

- Use electronic hearing protection that filters out damaging noise while allowing the user to hear human voices

Accessing Information From Video Tape:

- Add captions to in-house videos
- Purchase captioned videos
- Provide an interpreter
- Provide a script of the video

Transcribing Information From Audio Tape:

- Attach a pressure zone microphone (PZM) to the recording device
- Use a direct audio-input device, in-line amplifier, sound equalizer, or amplified headset
- Use the T-coil in a hearing aid and wear a headset just in front of the ear

Communicating With Customers Or Clients:

- Notify customers that the employee has a hearing loss and that they should look directly at the employee when speaking (the employee must agree to this accommodation) and ask customers to write down their questions.
- Place mirrors strategically around the work area to help alert the employee to the presence of customers

Taking Vital Signs:

- Provide an amplified stethoscope
- Provide a graphic auscultation system to provide a visual display of sounds made by the heart
- Provide a digital read-out blood pressure monitor



This information was compiled by Open Door Group to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

For more information contact:

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