

Tips for Communicating with a Person who is Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing

This tip sheet was created by Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals for the purpose of helping hearing people to communicate with any Deaf/HoH individuals more effectively. All of these tips are easy to do, but some may require a conscious effort at first to make them an integrated part of your communication process.

DO:

✓ FACE the person when speaking with them

- ✓ Ask the person what you can do to make communication easier. The person who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing will let you know their preferred method of communication.
- ✓ If the room has higher noise activity than usual, please attempt to move to a quieter area. Employ backup communication methods if there is a lot of noise or visual activity.
- ✓ Make sure the light is shining on your face, not behind you. Avoid standing in front of a light source when speaking. Make sure you have the person's attention.
- ✓ In group settings, make sure only one person at a time is talking.
- ✓ When using an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is Deaf. When the interpreter voices what the person signs, look at the person who is Deaf, *not* the interpreter.
- ✓ Speak naturally and clearly, with normal expression and at a normal pace.
- ✓ Rephrase, rather than repeat if you are not understood. Use fewer words or shorter phrases to clarify if communication is difficult.
- ✓ When writing back and forth, keep your word choices simple and sentences short. If the person uses more complex sentence and vocabulary, do the same.
- ✓ Be patient and take time to communicate. Saying "never mind" or "it's not important" may cause the person with hearing loss to feel that their contribution is not valued.
- ✓ Services such as TTY/IP Relay Service, VRS (Video Relay Service) are other communication options that empower Deaf, Deafened, or Hard of Hearing individuals to communicate with others via technology such as the telephone or cell phones.

DON'T:

- ✓ Don't refer the individual as hearing impaired (outdated and non-inclusive term). Do ask them what they prefer to be identified as - Deaf, Deafened, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind.
- ✓ Do not cover your mouth or have anything in your mouth when you are speaking.
- ✓ Do not shout. A loud voice may increase distortion or give the impression you are angry, without improving comprehension.
- ✓ Do not over-speak to fill in words or finish the person's thoughts or sentences.

Tips for Communicating with a Person who is Deaf-Blind

- ✓ People who are deaf-blind have many communication methods and styles. The person who is Deaf-Blind may be accompanied by a Deaf-Blind Intervenor. They will let you know the best way to communicate with them.
- ✓ Stand close to the person who is Deaf-Blind. Do not try to communicate from across the room or table.
- ✓ Always identify yourself to let the person who is Deaf-Blind know you are there. Approach from the front and then move to the side. This gives the person the opportunity to use any residual central or peripheral vision available.
- ✓ A person who is Deaf-Blind may request for or arrange for a Deaf-Blind Intervenor to accompany them. The Intervenor will provide the individual who is Deaf-Blind with information from the environment and will communicate on behalf of the individual.
- ✓ Some people who are Deaf-Blind will benefit from large print or Braille materials. Ask which print accommodations are effective.
- ✓ Avoid leaving a person who is Deaf-Blind standing in the middle of an open space, or alone in unfamiliar surroundings. Make sure there is somewhere for the person to sit, or something stationary to have contact with, such as a wall or table.