

Effective Communication Techniques: Communicating with People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Things to know:

- ◆ Deaf people are not all the same. A deaf person may use any or all of these communication techniques:
 - Lip-reading
 - American Sign Language (ASL)
 - Speech (using their voice)
 - Gestures
 - Oral auditory (e.g. hearing aid, cochlear implant)
- ◆ ASL is different than English, because it has its own grammar, syntax, and linguistic principles.
- ◆ A majority of deaf community members use sign language.
- ◆ The average for comprehending speech-reading is approximately 35% for most deaf individuals.
- ◆ Do not assume a person wearing hearing aids can hear you. Some people use hearing aids only to alert themselves to environmental sounds or for other reasons unrelated to increasing auditory signals.

Things to do:

- ◆ Give primary consideration to the individual's requested communication preferences.
- ◆ Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation, not the interpreter.
- ◆ Position yourself in a well-lit area, but not with your back to a bright light or window when facing the individual.
- ◆ Face the individual and if using an interpreter, talk directly to the individual.
- ◆ Use natural hand and body gestures and visual aids (i.e. pointing) to clarify information.
- ◆ Speak clearly at a natural pace.
- ◆ Check for comprehension if the conversation does not seem to be on track.
- ◆ Indicate when topics are changing in the conversation.
- ◆ Use pen and paper if requested.
- ◆ Be aware of situations where an individual may be waiting for a service via an audio announcement. Develop an alternative plan to ensure the individual has been notified.

Things to avoid:

- ◆ Physical barriers or lighting that makes it difficult to see each other.
- ◆ Conversations in large, open, and noisy surroundings; especially if the person is using hearing aid/s.
- ◆ Speaking before the individual has established eye contact.
- ◆ Turning around, looking down, looking away, or moving away while speaking.
- ◆ Over enunciation or shouting during the interaction.
- ◆ Overlapping the conversation while the deaf person is still signing and the interpreter is still voicing.

Resources: Rocky Mountain ADA Center, Colorado Springs, CO (www.adainformation.org); Deaf First, London, England (<http://www.deaf-first.org.uk/comm-tips.html>); Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY (<http://www.ntid.rit.edu/nce/employers/one-to-one-communication>).

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Last updated: 12/24/2015