

# How to Assist a Person Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing often encounter great difficulty in communicating with others. Public situations in which they are surrounded by people who do not use sign language are particularly troublesome. Imagine shopping in a place where no one speaks your language! Deaf people face that problem almost every day. You can help a Deaf or hard of hearing person who is having difficulty in public by remembering a few simple tips.

## Instructions:

- **Communicate** with a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing by facing forward, allowing him/her to see your face and lips at all times. Do not look around or turn away. Speak to the person directly, even if someone is interpreting your words. If they have a friend who is signing your words, pause every so often. This allows the signer to face each of you in turn. Noise such as in an arena or stadium, fans, motors, air conditioners, radios & TVs would hamper communication among those who can hear. Similarly a poorly lit area can result in the same end result for those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Consider the lighting.
- **Keep hands and other items away from your mouth.** Remove anything in your mouth, such as candy or gum. Enunciate your words. These small concessions make a big difference to a person trying to read your lips and body language. Please realize that lip reading, no matter how experienced the person is, has an approximate accuracy is not at 100%. Lip reading of English can be read on the lips with about 20-30% accuracy. The percent of understanding may increase depending on the skill of the person or if s/he is familiar with the context of the conversation.
- **Someone using American Sign Language (ASL.)** English words are fair, but they're not always fully understood due to the lack of conversational syntax, & the use of idioms, words and phrases that may not be understood in the full context and meaning of the conversation.
- **Speak in whole sentences,** at a normal pace and adult level. Remember you are communicating with an adult who is Deaf or hard of hearing, not a child.
- **Use body language & gestures.** Even if you are unable to sign, pointing or making descriptive motions with can help the person understand what you want him or her to know.
- **In a group setting,** ask one person to speak at a time. Make sure each speaker has the Deaf or hard of hearing person's FULL attention. It is acceptable to gently touch a Deaf person's shoulder, hand or elbow to get his or her attention, and to point out a new speaker, or something the person needs to look at.
- **Repeat yourself** as many times as necessary, or try another technique such as writing your comments down. Keep trying, without being dismissive out of frustration. Remember, the situation is equally frustrating for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing person.

End



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