
Deaf Individuals, Mental Illness and Law Enforcement

South Carolina Department of Mental Health
Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Definitions:

deaf – lacking hearing, either entirely or at a severe to profound level. This is a medical term.

Deaf - individuals who, in addition to not hearing, are members of the Deaf community, subscribing to the unique cultural norms, values, and traditions of that group. Members of this group typically use American Sign Language (ASL) as their 1st language.

hard of hearing (HoH) - an individual with a hearing loss (ranging from mild to severe)



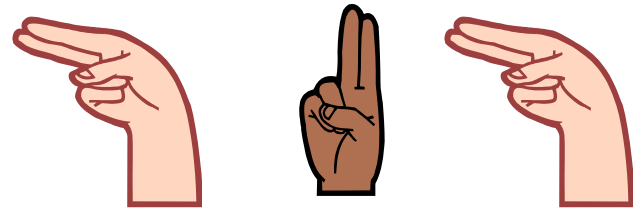
Definitions (cont.):

- “hearing impaired” – Deaf community does not consider themselves impaired, and “hearing” is not the important word
- The Deaf community prefers the terms Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- This term is also ambiguous as it does not define extent of hearing loss



Deaf Culture

- Primary language is ASL
 - Recognized language with its own rules of grammar and syntax
- English and ASL are NOT the same thing!
Consider the possibility of ESL (English as a Second Language)



ASL/English

The “ASL” slides are either written using ASL gloss (a teaching tool used to transcribe ASL sign for sign for those learning the language) or were written by a Deaf woman for whom ASL was a first language. This is a representation of what a Deaf person might write in each situation.

ASL

DADDY HIT MANY MANY
BLOOD ME SAW ME
AFRAID RAN TELL
FRIEND CALL POLICE
MAYBE JAIL

English

DADDY HIT MOMMY MANY
TIMES TIL I SAW BLOOD. I
WAS SCARED AND RAN
AND TOLD A FRIEND ABOUT
IT. MY FRIEND CALLED THE
POLICE AND DADDY MAY
GO TO JAIL

ASL

WOMAN SILLY MOUTH
WIDE MY FACE ME
UNDERSTAND NO

English

THE WOMAN WAS
SCREAMING. SHE WAS IN
MY FACE. I COULDN'T
UNDERSTAND HER

ASL

MAN DRIVE DRINK SEE
DOG HIT WOMAN SELF
MY-FRIEND SAW
WHOLE-THING TELL
ME WOW I CAN'T
BELIEVE

English

A DRUNK MAN HIT THE TREE
WHEN HE SWERVED TO
MISS A DOG. A WOMAN
WHO IS MY FRIEND SAW
THE WHOLE THING AND
TOLD ME ABOUT IT. I
COULDN'T BELIEVE IT.

When interacting with a Deaf/deaf person...



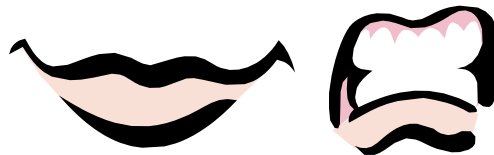
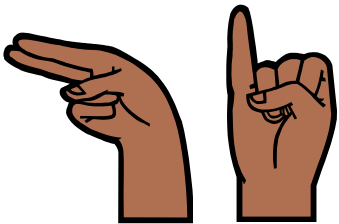
- Be extra aware of your body language and facial expressions
- Be on the lookout for the “smile and nod” that signals lack of comprehension



Communicating with the Deaf:

It is important to remember that not all Deaf people's communication needs are alike, and you should ask the person directly what their needs are. They may communicate through:

- Sign language (ASL, SEE, PSE, etc)
- Speech/lipreading
- Writing



Communicating with the Deaf

There is only one dumb question you can ask a deaf person (verbally):

CAN YOU LIPREAD?

Do you read lips?

Why is this a dumb question?

Lipreading: The Imprecise Art

Much of the English language looks very similar on the lips: for an example of that, try standing in front of a mirror and saying “Pay me, baby, maybe” or “I’ll have two, I love shoes, elephants snooze”

These may seem like extreme examples, but English is littered with them.



Lipreading: It's a gamble

Depending on lipreading as a communication method means you are gambling on the following:

- The deaf person has a high level of English proficiency
- The deaf person has a thorough understanding of the subject you are speaking of
- The deaf person is an expert lipreader
- Your body language and facial expressions are conveying the correct message
- The lighting and placement of both speaker and lipreader are correct
- 50-75% of the information is sufficient



Lipreading: Give the person a choice



Always ask how the deaf person wishes to communicate. Give options. Example: “Communicate best, how? Interpreter (I will pay), writing, lipreading?”

If lipreading is their preference:

If it is necessary to communicate with a Deaf person who indicates a preference for lipreading (only appropriate if both parties are completely comfortable) here are some tips:

Lipreading tips

- ✘ Hands down, the best way to sit is... hands down!
- ✘ Remember not to look at paper while talking
- ✘ Be conscious of lighting... don't sit with back to light
- ✘ Speak at a reasonable pace, but not S...L...O...W...L...Y
- ✘ If the person doesn't understand what you say at first... don't repeat. RESTATE.



Relay:

- Allows phone communication between Deaf and hearing people when the hearing individual does not have a TTY
- May use either text-based relay or video relay (VRS)
- Many prefer VRS due to its linguistic accessibility but the technology is not always available



Relay and TTY etiquette:

There are specific rules established to make communicating via relay easier—

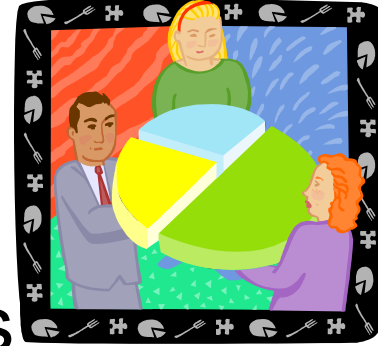
- When using any type of relay, address the operator as if they were the person you are talking to
Not “Tell them...,” but “I need to let you know...”
- If using text-based relay, do not interrupt conversation
- Be aware there may be a lag, and be patient

Relay and TTY:

Remember:

Relay is NOT a replacement for an interpreter. When using text-based relay, the English as a second language issue comes into play. When using VRS, you have little control over the choice of interpreters.

Domestic Violence/Child Abuse in the Deaf Community

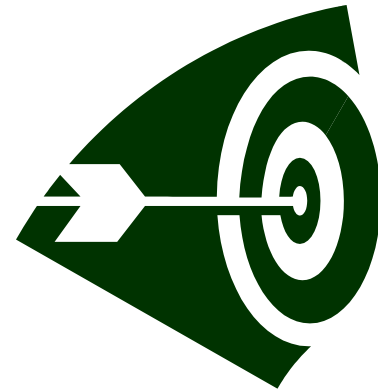


Most evidence regarding Deaf people is anecdotal – few studies focusing on this population.

- Studies indicate abuse is 2 to 6 times more likely to occur among people with disabilities
- Conservative figures indicate over 60% - 75% of Deaf persons have experienced or will experience abuse in their lifetime.

Why are Deaf people targets?

- Perceived as more vulnerable
- Easier to isolate
- Deaf Stressors



Deaf Individuals as Suspects and Arrestees

Communication at time of initial
encounter/arrest

Writing notes may or may not be enough

At time of questioning or interrogation

If you need the Miranda Warning, you need an
interpreter

At arraignment and court proceedings

Court Administration has rules governing interpreters in
court

Mental Health and Deafness

Individuals who are Deaf have the same mental health problems as hearing people

Accessible social services are often not there

It may not “look” the same as with hearing people and the family may not know that they have a mental illness

DMH has specialized services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people

Laws and Regulations Related to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

Americans with Disabilities Act

Requires that public agencies provide equal access to people with disabilities

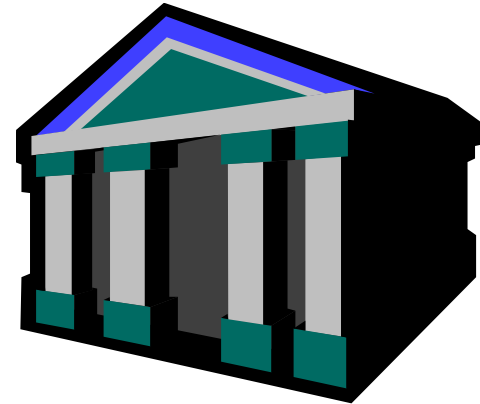
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Requires interpreters if you receive Federal funds

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act

Mandates language access

Lack of accessibility of the judicial and medical systems



- Lack of clear and understood interpretation
 - Lack of legal interpreters
 - Lack of interpreters in a timely manner
 - Refusal to follow the law
-

Lack of accessible/culturally competent services

- Hotlines not accessible – often hang up
- Advocates not trained
- Lack of interpreters on hand
- Lack of knowledge as to how to find an interpreter
- Lack of understanding about Deaf culture
- Lack of appropriate treatment - No signing therapists, doctors, etc



Any Questions?

Thanks!!