

Tips for communicating with a deaf person

Step one: getting the deaf person's attention

Both sign language and lip reading are highly visual, therefore eye contact is very important. Ensure you make eye contact with the deaf person by either waving gently in front of their face or by tapping them gently on the shoulder. If at a distance, it is acceptable to use vibration or light. For example when entering a large room, you could stamp the floor or flick a light switch to let them know you are there. Remain eye contact as much as possible throughout the conversation; this allows the deaf person to know you are listening.

Step two: ensure you are in a suitable environment

Minimise background noise; this could be auditory noise such as a radio or television, or visual noise such as distracting jewellery, bright clothing or wall displays. For the same reasons avoid public places where possible, or choose the quietest and least distracting corner of the room. Ensure there is good lighting and consider the direction of the lighting. Ensure that the light falls on your face, not theirs. If the light is behind you it will produce shadows on your face, and may also mean the deaf person has to squint to lip-read you.

Stand 3-6 feet away from the deaf person. This is important for hearing-aid users, lip-readers and signers. When you are speaking, here are some DOs and DON'Ts:

Step

Do	Don't
Speak Clearly at a normal speed or slightly slower than normal	Mumble or exaggerate your words - this will distort your lip patterns
Retain eye contact	Cover your mouth or look away
Speak at normal volume or slightly louder	Shout - this will distort lip patterns, deafness is about loss of pitch not volume
If there is more than one person speaking, take turns to talk	Speak over each other - this is very difficult for a deaf person to follow
If they do not understand the first time, repeat it, and then re-phrasing it as this will change the lip patterns. Don't be afraid to have a pen and paper handy to write down if necessary.	And remember: don't be afraid to check that the deaf person can understand you. If there is a break-down in communication, remember this motto: Repeat, Re-phrase, Write it down.

three: