

NTID Center on Employment

A unique employee. A superior solution.

How to Work with a Deaf Person

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How to Work with a Deaf Person

Full integration of deaf employees in all aspects of the worklife enables them to contribute the maximum to your organization, which is a model of success and strength in diversity. In turn, this model will create a positive image among a large and growing consumer group, persons who are deaf and hard-of-hearing

One-to-One Communication

COURTESIES

- Ask deaf employees how they prefer to communicate.
- Clearly explain the topic of the conversation and do so again when the topic changes.
- Encourage deaf employees to ask questions if communication is unclear.
- Be patient.
- Be prepared to repeat and rephrase information.
- Have pencil and paper available and use them if necessary.
- Remove pencils, gum, and cigarettes from your mouth.
- If you have a beard or mustache, consider the fact that they can interfere with a deaf employee's ability to hear you.
- Give deaf employees your full attention.
- Make eye-to-eye contact.

FEEDBACK

- Use facial expressions and body language to communicate the emotion of a message.
- Ask deaf employees to review key points of the conversation to ensure understanding.
- Watch deaf employees' eyes to ensure understanding. Don't depend on affirmative head nodding only.

SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT

- Reduce environmental distractions, such as background noise and movement.
- Refer to working drawings, diagrams, blueprints, and photographs during conversations.
- Position yourself in appropriate lighting so that your speaking and/or signs can be seen.

EQUIPMENT

- Use computers and electronic mail to communicate.
- Use telephone relay systems for interoffice and external communication.

EDUCATION

- Take a basic sign language course and encourage co-workers to do as well. Manual sign communication courses are taught in most communities at places like recreation centers, local colleges and universities, and associations and clubs for deaf people. Learn some [sign language](#).
- Ask deaf employees to teach co-workers some basic signs and fingerspelling.

Group Situations and Meetings

COURTESIES

- Ask deaf employees if they prefer an interpreter.
- Let deaf employees determine the best seating arrangement to see the speaker and interpreter.
- Assign a person to inform deaf employees of important announcements.
- Point to the person who is speaking.
- Watch for signals that deaf employees wish to contribute.
- Ensure that one person speaks at a time.
- Do not pace while giving a presentation.
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Do not talk with your back to the audience while writing on a blackboard.

SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT

- Consider the layout of the room (i.e. circular seating) in order to provide good communication.
- [Install assistive listening systems](#).
- Hold meetings in a quiet, well-lit room.

REVIEW

- Have minutes or notes taken for future reference.
- Review critical issues introduced in a meeting to ensure understanding.

EQUIPMENT

- Incorporate visual aids, demonstrations, flip charts, written agendas, and handouts in presentations. To learn about accommodations, click [here](#).

Integrating Deaf Employees in the Workplace

PRE-EMPLOYMENT

- Ensure upper-level management support.
- Clarify job requirements and job descriptions.
- Establish a TTY phone line in your Human Resources Department.
- Train the Human Resource Department to use the TTY effectively.
- Establish a 24-hour TTY Job Line.
- Select competent, technically qualified applicants.

- Provide organizational literature for review before the interview.
- Provide a written itinerary if more than one person is interviewing.
- Inform your receptionist or secretary that you are expecting a deaf applicant.
- Ask deaf applicants about an interpreter.
- Prepare and gather orientation materials.
- Prepare co-workers.
- Discuss with managers and supervisors the best ways to facilitate integration.
- Determine deaf employees' communication preferences.
- Retain an interpreter, if necessary

NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

- Provide name tags for everyone.
- Familiarize employees with the work environment.
- Review schedules for lunch times and breaks.
- Give a guided tour of the facility.
- Affirm your availability to answer questions and provide support.
- Use an interpreter for the first day.
- Discuss appropriate work behavior and dress code.
- Rely on an employee who knows sign language.
- Provide an organizational chart.
- Provide written policies of the organization.
- Give deaf employees information to read before the benefits meeting.
- Introduce employees to the benefits specialist.
- Use captioned films or videotapes, if available, that explain benefits.
- Review benefits booklet with employees.
- Keep employees up-to-date on policy changes.
- Make sure that all benefits terminology is clear.

ON THE JOB

- Ask the person how they prefer to be approached so that they are not startled.
- Install a light on the telephone to signal incoming calls.
- Rely on demonstration.
- Allow extra time for communication for training.
- Refer to clear, concise written instructions.
- Provide an outline of the training session.
- Get scripts of films and videos, and provide them for deaf employees in advance, or consider captioning.
- Assign someone to work directly with deaf employees during the training period.
- Offer frequent breaks to mitigate visual fatigue.
- Consider the deaf employees' communication needs in accessing information about career opportunities.
- Provide equal access to regular training required for promotions.

- Tailor training to the specialized needs of deaf employees.
- Include deaf employees in conversations.
- Share informal information.
- Include deaf employees in work break activities.
- Distribute memos for social events; include time, date and place.
- Ask deaf employees to organize social events.
- Provide opportunities for deaf employees to get to know fellow employees.
- Invite deaf employees to join you at lunch and coffee breaks.
- Assign someone to alert deaf employees to emergency situations.
- Install flashing lights to work in conjunction with auditory alarms.
- Review safety procedures, including exits and alarms.
- Encourage deaf employees to wear specially colored hard hats in construction areas.
- Use TTY or a vibrating beeper to contact deaf employees in the event of an emergency.
- Notify security if deaf employees are alone in work areas.

Accommodations

INTERPRETERS

Consider hiring an interpreter for occasions when communication is difficult, critical, or lengthy, such as during interviews, staff meetings, performance appraisals and training. Interpreters facilitate communication in a variety of ways: oral, sign language and cued speech.

Working with an Interpreter:

- Meet with the interpreter before the program to explain what will be covered. Make sure that they have a glass of water, a straight-back chair and a small light if necessary.
- If the program will last more than an hour and a half, two interpreters should be retained.
- Speak directly to deaf employees, not the interpreter. The interpreter is not permitted to voice personal opinions or enter the conversation.
- Interpreters work a few words behind the speaker and will need time to finish sentences. Speak in normal tones, complete sentences and use steady pacing and enunciation.
- During group discussions, only one person should speak at a time. Brief pauses between speakers permit the interpreter to finish before the next speaker begins.
- The interpreter should be to the side and a little behind the speaker or seated as part of a circle or semicircle to see all participants.
- Ensure that there is good lighting and a neutral or dark background behind the interpreter.

- Thank the interpreter and inform the referral service of deaf employees' satisfaction with the interpreter.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SYSTEM

A telephone relay system can help deaf and hearing colleagues communicate over the telephone by providing a simultaneous, three-way communication among a deaf person, a communication assistant and another person. The system uses two independent phone lines, one connected to a TTY and the other to a voice telephone. The communication assistant types what is spoken to the TTY user and voices what is typed to the non-TTY user. To use TRS, simply:

- Dial the TRS access number and give the CA the telephone number you wish to call.
- Once the call is connected, speak directly to the person you are calling.
- Say "Go Ahead" or "GA" when you finish your part of the conversation and are ready for a reply.
- All calls made through the TRS are strictly confidential and no records are maintained.

For deaf or hard of hearing people who can utilize their speech, an often-used method of communicating with voice users is voice-carry-over (VCO). Deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech disabled persons can speak directly into the telephone so you can hear the deaf person's voice. When the hearing person speaks, the CA will type what he/she is saying.

Some states have two different 800 numbers. The white pages of your phone book will list the relay number for your area.

NOTETAKING

Have hearing employees take notes during meetings, lectures and other presentations so that deaf employees have a written transcript of the information.

DEBRIEFING

Immediately after meetings and other presentations, consider meeting one-to-one with deaf employees to ensure that everything is clear.

CAPTIONING

Captioning is the process of converting the audio portion of a video production including dialogue and sounds into text, which is displayed on a television screen. The captions are typically white upper-case letters against a black background, similar to subtitles.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telecommunications encompasses a range of communication technologies that involve the use of telephone lines.

- Teletypewriter (TTY) [also called Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf (TDD) or Text Telephone (TT)]. These devices look similar to typewriter keyboards. To communicate directly, each caller must have a TTY. If one party doesn't have a TTY, the telecommunications relay service (TRS) may be used.
- FAX machines: Information and graphics can be transmitted via fax machine or by fax software.
- Pagers: Vibratory pagers with alphanumeric display screens offer a new way to contact deaf people. Some pagers can receive messages from touch-tone phones, personal computers, and TTY's.
- Cellular Phones: Cellular phones can be used by some deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. When using a hearing aid or TTY, special equipment may be needed to enhance the reception.
- Answering Machines/Services: Some Voice/TTY answering machines will accept TTY signals and can play TTY tones back through a TTY, making the message on the display readable as well as printable.
- Voice/TTY Mail Service: Most voice mail/auto attendant services are not compatible with TTY's. However, some equipment allows voice mail services to become TTY-compatible. The TTY caller will read a message of directions for contacting the right person. TTY users who have a TTY electronic mailbox can also retrieve messages left for them.
- Video conferencing allows two people to see and hear each other when making a telephone call.
- Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) allows a certified Video Interpreter Agent to link to a deaf person using sign language and/or speechreading and a standard phone user. During the relay call, both callers see only the Video Interpreter Agent, who interprets the visual sign language of the deaf caller to spoken English.
- Remote Interpreting allows a deaf and hearing person at the same location to work with an interpreter who is at a remote location, via video conferencing.

COMPUTERS

Computers facilitate communication in the workplace in a variety of ways.

- TTY Software: Enables people using personal computers and modems to communicate with ASCII-compatible TTY's available.
- Synchronous conferencing allows users to exchange text messages online in real time.
- Asynchronous conferencing allows users to send and receive messages online, but not in real time.
- Speech synthesizers provide synthesized voice output of letters, phonemes, words, or phrases typed on a keyboard.
- Automatic speech recognition transcribes a single person's spoken message, voiced into a microphone, into text displayed on a computer screen.

- C-print is a computer-assisted system for transcribing speech to print. It involves a hearing captionist typing words as they are being spoken and provides a real-time text display that the deaf person can read.
- Computer-assisted Notetaking allows notes and graphics to be typed almost simultaneously and displayed with overhead projectors for all to view.

PERSONAL AMPLIFICATION

These are mechanisms used to increase the intensity level of sound in the environment.

- Hearing aid is any electronic device designed to amplify and deliver sound to the ear consisting of a microphone, amplifier and receiver.
- Cochlear implant is a medical electronic device designed to deliver auditory information to individuals with severe and profound sensorineural hearing loss by stimulating the remaining auditory nerve fibers within the inner ear.
- Vibrotactile aid is a device that converts sound into vibration for tactile stimulation.

ASSISTIVE LISTENING SYSTEMS

For people who have difficulty hearing in large groups, at a distance, or in noisy environments, Assistive Listening Systems are helpful.

- Telephone amplifiers enable some deaf and hard-of-hearing people to use the telephone by raising its volume.
- An induction loop is a wire circling a given area connected to an amplifier and the speaker's microphone.
- An FM system has a microphone/transmitter and a receiver that allows the listener to use a headset, earphone, or hearing aid with a direct audio input boot.
- An Infrared system utilizes an emitter and a special receiver headset that picks up "infrared" light containing sound signals that are then directed into the ear.
- One-to-One communicator consists of a microphone, small amplifier, and headphone
- A Sound Field Amplification System includes a wireless microphone which transmits speech to speakers strategically placed within a conference room.

SIGNALERS

Signalers use light or vibration to warn people when there is an important sound nearby.

- Telephone signalers flash a light when the telephone rings.
- Doorbell signalers flash a light when the doorbell rings.

- Wake up alarms (lights, vibrators) flash lights or shake beds.
- Pagers can receive messages from touch-tone phones, personal computers and TTY's.
- Safety devices include strobe lights connected to fire alarms.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Environmental/architectural accommodations improve visibility and reduce vibrations and distracting noises. Each workplace will require different physical adjustments depending on deaf employees' tasks and communication preferences.

- Changing/adding lighting to enhance visibility.
- Blocking out extraneous noise to eliminate disturbances.
- Posting directional and safety signs as well as room numbers.
- Adding peepholes or vision panels to doors and walls to improve lines of sight.
- Using round or oval tables for group discussions.
- Convex mirrors allow pedestrians to see what's coming down hidden corridors.

HEARING DOGS

Hearing dogs assist with sound awareness, alerting their owners to important sounds. Hearing dogs have the same legal access rights as those accorded Seeing Eye dogs, including access to the workplace where the presence of the dog would be necessary for the performance of essential job functions.

SIGN LANGUAGE

Deaf people communicate using American Sign Language (ASL); fingerspelling; and a variety of other strategies; including speech, speechreading and writing. When communicating with deaf people, it is important that you:

- Get the deaf person's attention. A light touch on the arm, a wave, or other visual signal will help.
- Look directly at the deaf person when signing/speaking even when an interpreter is present.
- Make sure lighting enables your face and hands to be clearly visible.
- Speak normally and clearly without shouting.
- Use natural gestures and facial expressions to supplement your communication.
- Keep your hands away your face and mouth while speaking.
- If you have problems being understood, try rephrasing a thought using different words. Writing is also a good way to clarify.

For paper copies of sign language images, contact:

NTID Marketing Communications Department

(716) 475-6906 V/TTY; (716) 475-5623 FAX

E-mail: NTIDMC@rit.edu

or

[View online sign language images.](#)

There are also sign language dictionaries online, such as [HandSpeak](#), available for use.

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ACCOMMODATIONS

The local office of your state vocational rehabilitation or deaf service agency can help you obtain information specific to deaf people.

There is a listing of State Commissions/Offices on Deafness from Gallaudet University online at <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/>.

Links to Web sites of some of these offices can be found in the About Network's Deafness/Hard of Hearing section, at <http://deafness.about.com/>.

Other possible sources of information might be your local library, or regional health and human services offices.

Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue NW
Washington, D.C.
20002-3695
Academic Advising/Career Center
(202) 651-5355 (voice/TTY)
<http://depts.gallaudet.edu/aacc>
(cooperative education, internships, and permanent jobs)

Mainstream, Inc.
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 240
Takoma Park, MD 20912
(301) 891-8777 (voice/TTY)
Fax: (301) 891-8788
<http://www.mainstreaminc.org>

Office of Disability Employment Policy
1331 F. Street NW 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 376-6200 (voice)
(202) 376-6205 (TTY)
Fax: (202) 376-6219
<http://www.dol.gov>

Rochester Institute of Technology
National Technical Institute for the Deaf

Lyndon Baines Johnson Building
52 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5604
Center on Employment
(716) 475-6834 (voice/TTY)
fax: (716) 475-7570
<http://www.rit.edu/ntid/employer/>
(student and graduate placement, employer training and consultation)

National Business and Disability Council
201 I.U. Willets Road
Albertson, NY 11507-1599
(516)464-1515
Fax: (516)747-2046
<http://www.business-disability.com>

Job Accommodation Network
916 Chestnut Ridge
Road, Suite 1
Morgantown, WV 26506
(800) 526-7234 (voice/TTY)
<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>

FOR OTHER INFORMATION

National Council on Disability
1331 F Street NW, Suite 1050
Washington, DC 20004-1107
(202) 272-2004 (voice)
(202) 267-2074 (TTY)
<http://www.ncd.gov>

Able Data
8401 Colesville
Road, Suite 200
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 608-8998 (voice)
(301) 608-8912 (TTY)
<http://www.abledata.com>

National Captioning Institute
1900 Gallows Road, Suite 3000
Vienna, VA 22182
(703) 917-7600 (voice/TTY)
<http://www.ncicap.org>

Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf
8719 Colesville
Road, Suite 310
Silver Spring, MD
20910-3919
(301) 608-0050 (voice/TTY)
<http://www.rid.org>

Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.
8630 Fenton St., Suite 604
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3803
(301) 589-3786 (voice)
(301) 589-3006 (TTY)
fax: (301) 589-3797
<http://www.tdi-online.org>

Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue N.E.
Washington, DC 20002-3695
Info to Go, National Deaf Education Network and Clearinghouse
(202) 651-5051 (voice)
(202) 651-5052 (TTY)
fax: (202) 651-5054
<http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/InfoToGo/index.html>

Rochester Institute of Technology
National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Lyndon Baines Johnson Building
52 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5604
Educational Technology
Equipment: (716) 475-6425 (voice/TTY)
Captioning: (716) 475-6581 (voice/TTY)
<http://www.rit.edu/~493www/equipment.html>

The Law

LEGAL GUIDANCE

Signed into law in July 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights act for people with disabilities. The ADA guarantees equal access for people with disabilities in places of public accommodation, employment, transportation, and telecommunications. It also requires the provision of reasonable accommodations in state and local government services. It extends nondiscriminatory policies already established in the federal employment sector to employment in the private sector.

IMPLICATIONS OF ADA

- All employers with 15 or more employees must comply with the law.
- Employers may not discriminate against qualified disabled individuals in any part of the employment process, including job application procedures, hiring, compensation, job training, advancement, employer-sponsored activities, and discharge.
- Employers can ask about an individual's ability to perform a job, but not whether the person has a disability. Employers also cannot subject applicants to tests that tend to screen out those with disabilities; tests or other selection criteria must be related to the job in question and consistent with business needs.
- Employers must provide reasonable accommodation to people with disabilities unless undue hardship would result or significant risk of substantial harm cannot be eliminated or reduced by reasonable accommodation.

LEGAL DEFINITIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

- **Disability:** A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual, a record of such impairment, or being regarded as having a substantially limiting impairment.
- **Qualified Disabled Applicant:** An individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position.
- **Reasonable Accommodations:** Measures may include making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; job restructuring; part-time or modified work schedules; reassignment to a vacant position; acquisition or modification of examinations, training materials, or policies; the provision of interpreters; and other similar accommodations for individuals with disabilities.
- **Undue hardship:** This is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense for a business. Factors to be considered include the nature and cost of the accommodation; the overall financial resources of the employer involved; the number of employees; and the effect on the expenses, resources, and operations of the employing organization.
- **Direct threat to health and safety:** This refers to a significant risk of substantial harm that cannot be eliminated or reduced by reasonable accommodation. The risk need not be eliminated entirely for it to fall below the direct threat definition. The standard must apply to all individuals, not just those with disabilities. Any risk must be measured by objective evidence, and not by subjective criteria, including bias or unwarranted assumptions.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Companies offering telephone voice transmission service also must offer telephone relay services. All states have telephone relay services in operation.

