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PROGRAMMATIC ACCESS BULLETIN

TIPS FOR BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS WITH DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

There is a wide range of hearing abilities. Hearing disabilities may come at any time in a person's life. Some people are born with no hearing, while others lose it gradually over time.

Deaf and hard of hearing people communicate in different ways, depending on several factors: age at which deafness began; type of deafness; language skills; speech abilities; personality; family environment, and whether a person has a memory of sound.

Some people use speech only or a combination of sign language, speech reading (commonly known as "lip-reading"), finger-spelling, and speech or writing or body language and facial expression. For some Deaf people ASL (American Sign Language) and not English, is their native language. You can communicate with Deaf people in several ways. The key is to find out which combination of techniques works best with each Deaf person.

These guidelines should be used when the communication will be short, simple and straightforward. If the information being conveyed is more complex, is of longer duration, or is related to medical or legal matters, you will need to engage the services of a sign language interpreter, or other method of providing effective communication, such as real time captioning, depending on the needs of the individual and the nature and complexity of the communication.

For more information about how to locate and work effectively with interpreters, see the MOD Fact Sheet, "Tips for Using a Sign Language Interpreter".

One-to-one

Get the Deaf or hard-of-hearing person's attention before speaking. You should be sure to be in the person's line of vision. Call out the person's name; if that is not successful, a gentle touch on the shoulder, a wave, or other visual signal usually does the trick.

The noise level in a room can make a big difference. Be aware that a person with partial hearing may have trouble hearing in certain situations. For example, a person may not respond as names are called. You may need to locate a quiet place in which to converse, with little or no background noise. Even hearing aids provide little help in noisy environments.

Identify who you are. Introduce yourself or show your name badge or business card.

Key the Deaf person into the topic of discussion. Deaf people need to know what the subject matter is to be discussed in order to pick up words that help them follow conversation. This is especially important for Deaf people who depend on speech reading.

Avoid standing in front of a light source, such as a window or bright light. The glare and shadows created on the face make it almost impossible for the Deaf person to speechread.

Look directly at the Deaf person when speaking. Face the light. Avoid turning away to write on the board or pull something from a file.

Speak slowly and clearly, but do not yell, exaggerate, or over-pronounce. Exaggeration and overemphasis of words distorts lip movements, making speechreading more difficult. Try to enunciate each word, without force or tension. Short sentences are easier to understand than longer ones. It also helps to emphasize verbs and nouns.

First repeat, and then try to rephrase a thought if you have problems being understood, rather than repeating the same words again. Don't hesitate to try communicating by pencil and paper if necessary. Getting the message across is more important than the medium used.

Maintain eye contact with the person. Eye contact conveys the feeling of direct communication. Even if an interpreter is present, continue to speak directly to the person. He or she will turn to the interpreter as needed.

Do not place anything in your mouth when speaking. Mustaches that obscure the lips, smoking, pencil chewing, and putting your hand in front of your face all make it difficult for a Deaf person to follow what is being said.

Be courteous to the Deaf person during conversation. If the telephone rings or someone knocks at the door, excuse yourself and tell the Deaf person that you are responding to the knock or answering the phone. Do not ignore the Deaf person and carry on a conversation with someone else while the Deaf person waits.

Use visual supplements whenever possible. Ask if it would be helpful to communicate by writing or by using a computer terminal to type back and forth. Using photos, drawings, charts, can also help facilitate communication.

Use pantomime, body language, and facial expression to help supplement your communication.

Some people who are Deaf or hard of hearing may not speak or may have speech that is difficult to understand.

Focus on listening and communicating. Here are some tips:

- ◆ If you do not understand something, do not pretend that you do. Ask the person to repeat what was said, and then repeat it back.
- ◆ Be patient and respectful and take as much time as is necessary.
- ◆ Try to ask questions that require only short answers or a nod of the head.
- ◆ Discuss private or personal matters in a private room to avoid staring or eavesdropping by others, as you would do for any other person.

In writing

Always ask a Deaf person if they prefer written communication. Do not assume that this is the preferred method. When using writing as a form of communication with Deaf people, take into consideration their English and writing skills.

Keep your message short and simple. Establish the subject area, avoid assumptions, and make your sentence concise.

It is not necessary to write out every word. Short phrases or a few words often are sufficient to transfer the information.

Face the Deaf person after you have written your message. If you can see each other's facial expressions, communication will be easier and more accurate.

Use visual representations if you are explaining specific or technical vocabulary to a Deaf person. Drawings, diagrams, etc., help the person comprehend the information.

How to alert Deaf and hard of hearing people to your accessibility

It's important to make sure your department's customers and clients who are Deaf know that you have accessible services. One way is to include your TTY number next to your voice phone number on all brochures, flyers or other printed material you share with the public (or if you have no TTY, include the Relay Service number).

For symbols that denote access to the deaf community (to indicate that you have available interpreters, captioning, etc., see the MOD Programmatic Access Bulletin, "Access Symbols." Positive and negative tiff files of these symbols are available for copying or downloading via a link on MOD's website:

http://www.sfgov.org/site/sfmod_index.asp or directly via:

<http://www.gag.org/resources/das.php>

Local resources

Hearing and Speech Center of Northern California: www.hearingspeech.org
415 921-7658 (Voice) 415 921-8990 (TTY)

Deaf Counseling and Referral Agency (DCARA): www.dcara.org
510 483-0753 (Voice) 510 483-6914 (TTY)

Additional resources on Deafness

Association of Late-Deafened Adults: <http://www.alda.org/>

Bay Area Communication Access (BACA): bacareq@aol.com; 415-356-0405 (Voice); 415-356-0376 (TTY)

Deaf Resource Library: <http://www.deaflibrary.org/>

Deaf Services Division/San Francisco Library: 415-557-4434 (Voice), 415-557-4433 (TTY)

Deaf Services of Palo Alto: interpreters@dspa.org, 650-856-9262 (Voice)

Hands On Services: <http://www.handsonsvc.com>; 800-900-9478 (Voice); 800-900-9479 (TTY); 800-900-9477 (Fax)

Hearing Loss Association of America; <http://www.hearingloss.org>; 301- 657-2248 (Voice & TTY); 301-91309413 (Fax)

Interpreting and Consulting Services: sign4life@aol.com; 707-747-8200 (Voice); 707-747-9677 (TTY); 707-747-8205 (Fax)

National Association of the Deaf (NAD): <http://www.nad.org/>

National Deaf Education Center: <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/InfoToGo/index.html>

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03/07

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