

DELIVERING LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

GUIDANCE NOTES ON WORKING WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES

DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

Background information

It's very rare to meet a person who is totally deaf to all sounds. However most **profoundly deaf** people are totally deaf to speech, or the sounds are so distorted for them that they cannot understand the words by hearing alone, even with the use of a hearing aid. They may communicate mainly through speech and **lipreading** or through **sign language** – or a combination of these. Many profoundly deaf people do wear hearing aids, as these may help by giving them the rhythm of speech which aids them in lipreading.

A person who is **partially deaf** or hard of hearing may benefit greatly from a hearing aid – as long as there is no background noise. However, a hearing aid does not restore normal hearing. It can amplify sounds (including background noise) but it does not correct the distortion of speech sounds which most people who have a hearing loss experience. A person who is partially deaf usually relies partly on **lipreading** and may use **some sign language** or benefit from meaningful **natural gesture**.

Methods of communication

Listening	Lipreading	Facial expression
Gestures	Drawings	Mime
Writing	Speech	Sign Language

What you can do.....

Each time you start a conversation

- Attract the deaf person's attention, perhaps by a gentle hand on their arm or some other visible signal.
- Move away from background noise so that the hearing aid can be helpful.
- Use objects around you (a book, newspaper, pen etc.) to help illustrate your conversation.
- Make sure there is enough light and that neither of you is silhouetted against a strong light.

When you are speaking

- Don't shout. It's impolite, uncomfortable for a person wearing a hearing aid, makes lipreading more difficult and makes you look and feel irritable.
- Speak clearly but do not overemphasise mouth movements.
- Keep the normal rhythm of speech.
- Use natural gestures and facial expressions.
- Look directly at the deaf person, even if they are accompanied by someone. If you turn your face away the person may have difficulty seeing your lips and facial expression.
- Avoid putting your hands in front of your mouth or face when you are speaking.
- Stay in one place while speaking. It is difficult to lipread someone who is moving about.
- Think before you speak. Use short, concise sentences. Repeat the whole sentence if it is not understood the first time. If something is not understood after it has been repeated the first time, then reword it, as some words are difficult to lipread.
- If you use unfamiliar words, write them down and, if necessary, explain them.
- Check to see if you have been understood.
- Smile occasionally and try not to appear rushed or impatient.

When you are listening

- Listen carefully. Pay attention to facial expressions and gestures.

- If you don't understand what is said, ask for it to be repeated. If you pretend to understand when you don't, you will have problems later.
- If in doubt, ask questions to check that you did really understand.

Communications support

- Induction loop system
- Minicomms (textphone)
- Videophones
- Typetalk