

Communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing

Achieving access for all





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Remember there are different degrees and types of deafness, and different ways for deaf people to communicate. As Croydon is a diverse borough, there are some deaf and hard of hearing persons who have little or no understanding of either British Sign Language (BSL) or written / spoken English.

In general many people have faint or distorted hearing, and some have no useful hearing at all. Many can join in a conversation by using a hearing aid or lip reading and some use sign language. The following will help you when meeting a person who is hard of hearing.

- When communicating in written English, it is important to be aware that deaf sign language users may have limited literacy skills, as written English is not their first language.
- Make sure a deaf person is looking at you before speaking. A gentle touch on the shoulder or arm will attract attention. Always look directly at him or her to make communication easier and keep your hands away from your face as this hinders effective lip reading.
- Speak at a normal pace, allow a little more time, and be aware the listener needs to look at your face as you talk.
- Background noise can make it difficult for people who use a hearing aid, as
 it distorts and masks sound. Be prepared to repeat yourself if the person
 cannot hear you clearly.
- Try not to raise your voice as this actually distorts speech which makes it hard for the person to understand. It also distorts facial expressions which may be interpreted as aggression.
- Do not panic if you are not immediately understood. Try re-phrasing your sentence, cutting out any long or unusual words.
- If necessary, write things down. This may be useful if the person uses sign language. Ordinary facial expressions and gestures may help to get your message across.
- Always talk directly to the deaf person not their friend, colleague, or interpreter.



- Where loop systems are installed they must be regularly and professionally tested. It is important to repair items promptly when they are found to be faulty.
- When communicating with deaf and hard of hearing people, it is essential to seek clarification and ensure that the person has understood what has been conveyed. This applies when communicating in both BSL and written English.

Access to information is not just about the printed word. Much information is communicated verbally. For those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment this can result in receiving inaccurate information or no information at all.

- All offices should have access to alternative methods of communication such as Typetalk, MSN, e-mail, fax and mobile phones (text only). It is important to establish the preferred method of contact.
- All information should be in text as well as verbal formats. This is especially important at reception desks.
- Where DVDs are being used to convey information, these should include subtitles and preferably be signed as well.
- All reception desks should have a loop system which is clearly signed. Visitors must be able to access all information from a desk with a loop.
- There should always be a minimum of one interview room with a loop system in any public contact area. When inviting people to an interview or meeting, publicise access facilities such as loop systems.
- Offer the use of a confidential room if personal information needs to be discussed. With a hard of hearing person you may have to speak louder resulting in information being overheard at a reception desk. Information may also be picked up by other hearing aid users through the loop system. This also applies to people who sign as there may be other sign users in the vicinity.



- If you know in advance that a visitor has a hearing impairment it is essential to meet their communication needs. Ask how they would prefer to communicate.
- Face the light, don't sit with your back to the window or light. If possible, use blinds to adjust lighting to suit the needs of the person.
- In a meeting always speak one at a time.
- When interviewing always have a pen and paper with you. Written notes may help you clarify information.
- Any open presentation, roadshow, exhibition or public meeting should have a signer or palantype operator present. See Checklist for Organising a Conference. Palantype is more suitable for conference style meetings than roadshows.

British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and palantype operators can be booked through the Council's Translating and Interpreting Service on **020 8726 6000** extension **61910**. More detailed information on communicating with hard of hearing, deaf and deafblind people is available from the RNID website at: **www.rnid.org.uk** and from Croydon Hearing Resource Centre on **020 8686 0049**.