Vicdeaf Training Resource

Deaf Awareness Training

- Perspectives of Deafness
- Degrees of Hearing Loss
  - Auslan
  - Working with an Auslan Interpreter
- Communication Barriers and Strategies
  - Technology
The Deaf community is a minority cultural group within Australia that has its own language: Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Deaf Awareness Training aims to provide the wider community, organisations, businesses, schools and services with appropriate and relevant information about Deaf people and how they are part of a wider Deaf community.

Most importantly, Deaf Awareness is about providing knowledge and strategies for improving the interaction between Deaf and hearing people.

According to the policy of Deaf Australia, a consumer body representing Deaf people Australia wide, the first letter in the word Deaf is capitalised when referring to the Deaf community, Deaf culture and Deaf language. It is not capitalised when referring to physical deafness.

Medical Model
- Seen as a disability and/or an impairment
- Focus on the ability to speak, lipread and using audiological technology to hear

Cultural Model
- Identify as cultural & linguistic minority
- Celebrate their identity, e.g. Deaf Achievers, Deaflympians, Deaf Actors, Artists, etc.
- Use the term “Deaf” to represent their language, community and culture

Deaf/Hard of Hearing - What's the Difference?

The Deaf community is considered to be a linguistic and cultural minority group, similar to an ethnic community. Just as we capitalise the names of ethnic communities and cultures (e.g., Italian, Jewish) we capitalise the name of the Deaf community and culture.

Since not all people who are physically deaf use Auslan and identify with the Deaf community, the “d” in deaf is not capitalised when we are referring to all deaf people or the physical condition of hearing loss.

The term “hard of hearing” may be used to describe all degrees of hearing loss up to and including total deafness. It is more likely to be used by individuals who have had their hearing after the point of language acquisition (usually as a teenager or adult).

Hard of hearing also usually describes people that use spoken language to communicate rather than sign language. Hard of hearing is not widely used to describe the Deaf community in terms of culture, language, history and camaraderie.

People in the Deaf community do not feel that they need to integrate socially with the hearing community, often being born Deaf or become Deaf in their infancy. They therefore do not feel that they miss out on sound, since they have never had the experience of hearing.
### DEGREES OF HEARING LOSS USING DECIBELS

What do the different degrees of hearing loss mean in ‘real life’ terms? A decibel is the unit used to measure the intensity of sound. The decibel scale is not linear but logarithmic. Your ears can hear everything from your fingertip brushing lightly over your skin to a loud jet engine. In terms of power, the sound of the jet engine is about one billion times more powerful than the smallest audible sound.

On the decibel scale, the smallest audible sound (near total silence) is 0dB. A sound 10 times more powerful is 10dB. A sound 100 times more powerful than near total silence is 20dB.

The following classifications show the approximate relationship between the decibel hearing loss and the degree of difficulty it may cause:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Hearing Loss</th>
<th>Decibel Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profound hearing loss</td>
<td>91+ dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe hearing loss</td>
<td>76-90 dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately severe hearing loss</td>
<td>61-75 dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate hearing loss</td>
<td>21-45 dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild hearing loss</td>
<td>21-45 dB</td>
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- **Profound hearing loss**: Profoundly deaf people have similar difficulties as people with a severe hearing loss but there is greater inconsistency in the benefit from hearing aids (particularly with 105+ dB hearing losses). Learning to speak is difficult for children born with a profound hearing loss, but it depends on the degree of loss as to how difficult it will be. Some profoundly deaf people can understand clear speech via listening alone in good auditory conditions with a hearing aid, while others find it impossible.

- **Severe hearing loss**: For severely hearing impaired people, normal conversational speech cannot be heard. Speech and language do not develop spontaneously in a child born with this degree of impairment. Hearing aids will amplify many speech sounds and will greatly assist a child to develop speech, but speech quality is likely to be affected. Visual cues will usually assist in understanding speech.

- **Moderately severe hearing loss**: Without a hearing aid, only a raised voice at a close distance can be understood by people with a moderately severe hearing loss. Without amplification, a child’s speech and language would generally not develop spontaneously and speech quality would be poor. However, hearing aids should allow conversational speech to be heard in quiet listening conditions, and with appropriate training most speech sounds should be correctly recognised and reflected in a child’s own speech. Visual cues are a definite advantage. Voices may sound quite distorted, even when loud enough and this can restrict the benefit of hearing aids.

- **Moderate hearing loss**: A person with this degree of loss would have difficulty understanding conversational speech, particularly in the presence of background noise. TV and radio would have to be turned up to be heard. Speech and language development are generally affected if a hearing aid is not provided early to a child born with this degree of loss. Hearing aids usually assist most hearing difficulties if speech discrimination (that is, how clearly speech is heard) is good and the listening environment is not too noisy.

- **Mild hearing loss**: A person with a mild loss would have some difficulty hearing soft speech and conversations, but can often manage in quiet situations with clear voices. Voices can often sound muffled and unclear. Speech and language usually develop normally if a child is fitted with hearing aids early. Hearing aids will assist most hearing problems.
Deaf people miss out on a lot of information, not just the news or information from the community but also information about what their family and some friends talk about. They do not have “subconscious” environmental learning or knowledge by overhearing the conversations around them, so knowledge gaps and conversations without relevant context can occur.

Often parents of Deaf people have now learnt sign language which can sometimes result in missed explanations of simple occurrences and conversations. This can often give them a different understanding of how something works, why something happens or misunderstandings about times, events or dates.

It is natural that the flow of information in a hearing environment is open within the immediate environment, but this changes drastically with the addition of a Deaf person to the environment. Moreover, it can be severely restricted when environments with deaf and hearing members do not have a mutual communication system. This is the major cause of miscommunication and misunderstanding experienced by both the hearing and deaf participants in any given social interaction; hence the need for both parties to have access to Auslan or other forms of visual communication.

Lipreading is a skill that requires a person to rely on what can be seen on another person’s lips. Approximately 90% of speech sounds are made behind the teeth which renders them difficult to see by the lipreader.

There are 44 different speech sounds in the English language (more in other languages) and only 5 of them are visible being “m”, “b”, “p”, “f”, “v”. Unfortunately again “m”, “b” and “p” all look the same. So for a person who is lipreading, that leaves them with 2 speech sounds that they can learn to recognise “f” and “v”, and a guess between 3 others “m”, “b” and “p”. The other 39 speech sounds can not be recognised on the lips.

When you put sounds together to make words (i.e. Connected speech sounds to represent an item) it is almost impossible to predict what is being said from lip patterns alone. Then put words into sentences, and the job is even more difficult.

It is true that some Deaf people are good at lipreading, but what makes this possible is the context of the communication. If the person is familiar with the topic and the speaker then they would use that knowledge, more than the words themselves to follow what is going on. Add to that some residual hearing and hearing aids, then the situation might change for each individual.

An assumption is also being made that the person has a good command of the English language to assist them with their prediction. If they don’t know the words then they obviously won’t be able to recognise them. Many Deaf people do not have good literacy skills (a failure of the education system and not a reflection of their potential), so they have this additional barrier.
AUSLAN
(AUSTRALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE)

Auslan is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community. The term Auslan is a portmanteau of "Australian sign language", coined by Trevor Johnston in the early 1980's, although the language itself is much older.

Auslan is related to British Sign Language (BSL) and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL); the three have descended from the same parent language, and together comprise the BANZSL language family. Auslan has also been influenced by Irish Sign Language (ISL) and more recently has borrowed signs from American Sign Language (ASL).

As with other sign languages, Auslan's grammar and vocabulary is quite distinct from English. Its invention cannot be attributed to any individual; rather, it is a natural language that developed organically over time. Traditionally, the language has been passed from one generation to the next in school environments, Deaf clubs, sporting associations and the general Deaf community. In the past, even when signs were not permitted in the classroom, the language continued to be passed on by children of Deaf parents, Deaf teachers and staff.

Is Auslan a Universal Language?

Just as hearing people in different countries speak different languages, so Deaf people around the world sign different languages. Deaf people in Japan, for example, use a different sign language to that used in Australia. Due to historical influences, Auslan is more like British Sign Language (BSL) than American Sign Language (ASL).

Is Auslan a form of English?

Auslan has its own distinct grammatical structure. This structure is visual rather than auditory, and is composed of precise handshapes and movements, facial expression and body movement.

**English sentence construction:**
I saw a beautiful black cat this morning

**Auslan sentence construction:**
Black cat beautiful this morning I saw
OR
Cat black I saw this morning beautiful.

Is Auslan a series of made up gestures?

 Gestures are the use of the body, hands, facial expression; all of which can convey a message. It assists in expressing emotions, whether they are sadness, anger, happiness, reluctance, etc. People who can hear use the tone of their voice to differentiate between different emotions and attitudes – it is a very effective way to communicate. Just like using tone, the use of gesture is very important to Auslan to convey meaning and emotion – although Auslan is a structured language which is not made of random gestures.
COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

Communication is a two-way process; the following points can make the communication process easier:

1. Approach the person normally, then ask them what type of communication style they prefer - i.e. lip reading, written communication.

2. Gain the person's attention before speaking. There are many ways of attracting attention; if possible, ask the person with the hearing loss for suggestions. A gentle touch on the arm or a wave in their visual field may be adequate.

3. Let the person with the hearing loss know the subject of the conversation beforehand if possible, and try and cue him or her in to any change of topic. Use plain language and allow time for your message to be understood.

4. Speak clearly and at a slow to moderate pace. Exaggeration or over emphasis of words will distort lip movements, making speech reading more difficult.

5. Make eye contact when communicating and try looking directly at the person while speaking and be at the same eye level if possible; stand if he/she is standing or sit if he/she is sitting. Even a slight turn of the head can obscure vision. Other distractions include beards and moustaches, which obscure the lips.

6. Try to show facial and body expression. You don't have to be a mime, as everybody uses some form of body language in communication.

7. Avoid habits such as smoking, gum or pencil chewing, putting hands in front of the face or eating while speaking.

8. Ensure that any lighting is on your face and not behind you. Lighting behind the speaker will create glare and make it harder for the person to gain visual cues for lipreading. Avoid shadows across your face.

9. Cut down background noise where possible. If someone is using speechreading and residual hearing to communicate, background noise can make listening very difficult.

10. Maximise environmental visual cues. Good signage, directions, handouts, notes and use of captions on videos can all help to convey the message.

11. Consider the distance between the person with the hearing loss and yourself. This will affect listening and lipreading.
Only about 30% of what we say can be seen on the lips and mouth. Not everyone with a hearing loss can read lips and even the best speechreaders miss many words. If the person seems to be having difficulty comprehending, try to repeat the message. If the deaf person doesn’t understand you after repeating, try rephrasing the message.

Use pencil and paper to supplement your communication if necessary. A Deaf person may prefer writing notes. In a noisy environment writing down key words may assist those who are hard of hearing. It is important to be flexible to each person’s needs.

Do not shout – they will not hear you if you raise your voice any louder and shouting distorts lip patterns.

When in doubt, ask the person with the hearing loss for suggestions to improve communication.

See the section: “Working with an Auslan Interpreter” for suggestions on communicating with a Deaf person using an interpreter.

Do not assume that those with a hearing loss do not need a telephone in a work situation, although it may need to be a telephone with a volume control or a special visual text telephone such as a Telephone Typewriter (TTY).

Many Deaf people have a small amount of residual hearing, which is enhanced by hearing aids and assistive listening devices. Individuals who are hard of hearing may also benefit from a range of devices. Contact the Service for information about assistive listening devices. Phone 1300 30 20 31. The Service is a business unit of Vicdeaf.

The Commonwealth Government funds a National TTY Relay Service which relays phone calls between Deaf people or those with a hearing or speech impairment and the wider community. Telephone 13 36 77 to access the National TTY Relay Service.

Communication is enhanced when all parties present are patient, positive and relaxed.
TIPS FOR STAFF WORKING WITH DEAF/HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

- Don’t assume a person with hearing aids has perfect hearing; there is no substitute for ears that work!
- Be careful not to patronise – people with hearing loss are not stupid
- Don’t presume to know what is best; ask first before making any adjustments
- Repeat misunderstood questions, or comments; if they miss the same phrase on the second time, then rephrase, starting with the topic
- Check with open-ended questions to make sure information has been understood
- When possible, give staff an outline of what will be discussed at the meeting (i.e. meeting agenda)
- If necessary, send a follow up email just make sure all information transferred is clear and understood
- Contact JobAccess for a free assessment of your workplace to identify technology that will support a deaf person in the workplace. Modifications recommended by JobAccess can also be funded under the Workplace Modification Scheme
- When at a meeting with staff, ensure to put your hand up and wait until the interpreter finishes before starting further conversation
- Hearing people gather information incidentally through the conversations that go on around them. Do not be surprised if a deaf person has missed out on some information that you would usually expect to be common knowledge. This is especially the case if the deaf person is not confident with their English skills. For many deaf people, English is very much a second language. When deaf people read or write, they are often translating between Auslan and English in their heads.
- Allow staff some time to process before they respond
- Avoid the use of slang and clichés, which may be hard to understand or interpret

COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY

The following devices and services are available to Deaf and hard of hearing people in most circumstances and can be used effectively in the workplace:

- TTY/Fax
- Email
- Hearing Loops in lecture theatres and conference rooms
- National Relay Service (13 36 77) and Emergency Relay Service (106)
- Assistive Listening Devices (ask for a brochure)
- Short Message Service (SMS)
- Television – captions and subtitles
- Video Conferencing
- MSN/AIM/ichat (any internet chat programs)
What is interpreting?

Interpreting is the act of transferring a message from one language to another, in this case from Auslan to English and vice versa utilising one’s linguistic and cultural knowledge in both languages.

Auslan interpreting was originally done by helpful friends and families of Deaf people, however, knowing both sign language and English does not qualify a person as an interpreter. Interpreters are professional people who study a highly specialised skill.

They work in a variety of settings and situations, and many interpreters have additional skills and qualifications and work in specialist areas.

Qualifications of an Interpreter

Sign language interpreters are accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), as are all spoken language interpreters in Australia.

There are currently two different levels of interpreters. A paraprofessional interpreter is accredited at the first level and is suitable for job interviews, Centrelink appointments and some medical appointments. When a paraprofessional interpreter has been working for a number of years and has developed excellent knowledge and skills, he or she may be tested and if successful will be accredited at the interpreter level. An interpreter at this level is able to interpret in court, at mental health appointments and conferences and is able to adjust to a broad range of Deaf consumer preferences and/or needs for interpretation.

The Role of the Interpreter

- The interpreter will facilitate communication between two parties that do not share the same language.
- The interpreter will sign what is spoken and speak what is signed, conveying meaning and intent.
- The interpreter will not add, embellish or delete information.
- The only time the interpreter should be involved in the discussion is when a word or phrase needs to be clarified from either the hearing or Deaf person.
- Interpreters are bound by a code of ethics that, among other things, stipulates that all content of an assignment is confidential.
WORKING WITH AN AUSLAN INTERPRETER

The interpreter works with both parties and is accustomed to working with a variety of interdisciplinary teams.

For successful interpreting sessions:

- Ensure lighting and seating arrangements are appropriate for clear communication to take place. The Deaf person, hearing person and the interpreter should consult about this first. It is normally best if the interpreter is seated next to the main speaker and opposite to the Deaf person.

- The interpreter does not give a literal word for word interpretation, but rather conceptual meaning. Be aware that this may take more or less time, depending on the differences between the two languages.

- The Deaf person will look at the interpreter and also at the person speaking when appropriate. The speaker should look at the Deaf person, not the interpreter.

- If written material is present, please allow time for the Deaf person to read before continuing. Deaf people are unable to watch the interpreter and read at the same time. It is important to remember this if overheads are being used or notes need to be taken.

- In accordance with Occupational Health and Safety issues and the quality of interpreting, regular breaks should be negotiated prior to the commencement of the appointment.

- Sometimes it is necessary to have two or more interpreters working in tandem. This usually occurs if the appointment is greater than one hour. The need for tandem interpreting can be clarified with the Interpreting and Notetaking Service at the Victorian Deaf Society.

DEAF INTERPRETERS

There are times when it is appropriate and, indeed, necessary to include Deaf interpreters as part of an interpreting assignment. Deaf interpreters are specially trained and certified users of Auslan who are able to convey meaning from standard Auslan to a highly visual form of gesture often better understood by some Deaf people who have non-standard Auslan.

Working with an interpreter is a unique way of communicating. When all parties are familiar with the process it is highly effective.
If you would like more information about Vicdeaf and our services, please contact us:

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