



## Language and Culture

### Communicating with People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

*According to the policy of Deaf Australia (the 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.*

Those people who have a hearing loss but who rely on English or another spoken language as their main means of communication, are referred to as 'hard of hearing' or 'hearing impaired'. They will usually rely on their remaining hearing, hearing aids and other devices, plus speechreading (lipreading), visual cues and tactics and strategies to communicate effectively.

People born with a profound hearing loss may receive very little or no benefit from hearing aids. They may find it very difficult to learn to speak because they are not able to hear speech and may choose to communicate in Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

Some people with a less severe hearing loss are able to use sign language and often learn to speak. They may choose to communicate in Auslan and also use some speech, lipreading and residual hearing to assist communication when appropriate.

When talking to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, it is important to choose the correct mode of communication whenever possible. This may necessitate the use of an Auslan interpreter. Auslan Connections, book accredited interpreters and notetakers for individuals and organisations. For more information on booking an Auslan Interpreter, contact Auslan Connections.

Phone. 03 9473 1117

Web. [www.auslanconnections.com.au](http://www.auslanconnections.com.au)

#### **Communication is a Two Way Process**

The following points can make the communication process easier:

1. 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 may be adequate.
2. 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.
3. Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Exaggeration

or over emphasis of words will distort lip movements, making speech reading more difficult. Raising voice volume excessively or shouting is not helpful, and often counter-productive.

4. Look 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.
5. 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.
6. Avoid habits such as smoking, gum or pencil chewing, putting hands in front of the face or eating while speaking.
7. 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.
8. Cut down background noise where possible. If someone is using Speechreading and residual hearing to communicate, background noise can make listening very difficult.
9. Maximise environmental visual cues. Good signage, directions, handouts, notes and use of captions on videos can all help to convey the message.
10. Consider the distance between the person with the hearing loss and yourself. This will affect listening and lipreading.
11. 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 rephrase the message instead of repeating it exactly.
12. 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.
13. When in doubt, ask the person with the hearing loss for suggestions to improve communication.
14. See Expression Australia fact sheet, "Working with an Auslan Interpreter" for suggestions on communicating with a Deaf person using an interpreter.
15. 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 and/or tone control or a special visual text telephone such as a Telephone Typewriter (TTY).

16. 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 Expression Audiology for information about assistive listening devices.

Phone. 1300 30 20 31

17. The Commonwealth Government funds a National Relay Service which relays phone calls between Deaf people or those with a hearing or speech impairment and the wider community.

Phone. 13 36 77 to access the National Relay Service.

18. Communication is enhanced when all parties present are patient, positive and relaxed.

For more information speak to an expert at:



**Expression**  
Australia

**Expression Australia**

Email. [info@expression.com.au](mailto:info@expression.com.au)

SMS/FaceTime. 0402 217 586

Skype. [expression.australia](https://www.skype.com/en/contacts/australia/expression-australia)

Phone. (03) 9473 1111

**[expression.com.au](http://expression.com.au)**

***Expression Australia is a not-for-profit organisation founded by the Deaf community.***

**Copyright Notice**

This page and all its components (including images and text) are copyright. Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced, copied, transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical or graphic) without the prior written permission of Expression Australia (Victorian Deaf Society). All requests and enquiries should be directed to Expression Australia. ©2020-21

**Expression Australia**

Level 4, 340 Albert Street, East Melbourne VIC 3002

**[expression.com.au](http://expression.com.au)**

Victorian Deaf Society ABN. 56 004 058 084

**Building opportunity through inclusion**