

Deaf Etiquette

When speaking with deaf people, the most important item of etiquette to remember is that they deserve the polite respect that would be given to any other person. A person's deafness doesn't mean that he or she deserves any less consideration than anyone else. Furthermore, many deaf people prefer not to receive any special treatment other than the use of an interpreter, if needed. For instance, a well-meaning host who goes out of his or her way to introduce a deaf person to every guest at a party will likely be making the deaf individual feel uncomfortable. The person may not want to share information about his or her life or deaf culture with everyone at the party. Talking to a deaf person in an easy, friendly manner is the best way to approach the situation. The following are a few other practical points of etiquette to remember when speaking to deaf people.

First, some people in the deaf community use interpreters to help them communicate with others. For example, a student in a deaf education classroom may have an interpreter with him or her during a lecture. Some people with deafness have interpreters with them for doctor's appointments, during work hours, or while conducting a business transaction. When a deaf individual has an interpreter, it's important to talk to the deaf person and not to the interpreter. If a person faces the interpreter and talks to him or her, the deaf individual feels edged out of the exchange. The situation would be similar to one person speaking with another while staring out into the distance. The deaf person is still the one participating in the conversation even if there is an interpreter present.

Another point of etiquette to remember when speaking with deaf people is to get their attention in a polite way before trying to speak with them. A person may tap a deaf individual on the shoulder or give a quick hand wave to get his or her attention. There's no need to go through any exaggerated movements or do anything to startle the person. Members of the deaf community understand that people will need to get their attention before speaking with them. Part of deaf education is learning to focus on the person who is speaking especially if the member of the deaf community is trying to lip-read.

Lip-reading is another topic of etiquette to consider when speaking with deaf individuals. Deaf people who lip-read need the individuals they are conversing with to speak distinctly. The person doesn't need to speak in an unusually slow manner, but should say words clearly so the person with deafness can understand. Also, a deaf person will have an easier time lip-reading if there are no obstructions between him or her and the other individual. In short, there are several little things a person can do to make the lip-reading work of a deaf person easier.

Finally, students who go through deaf education discover the most efficient ways for them to communicate. In fact, people in deaf culture communicate in a variety of ways including sign language, lip-reading, and even by speaking aloud. A person who wants to speak with a deaf person should be respectful of the way he or she wants to communicate. By talking with a deaf person, an individual can learn about deaf culture and get to know something about the person's background. The person may even find that he or she and the deaf individual have many common interests. With a little consideration, speaking with a deaf person can be as natural as speaking with any other friend.

Models of Deafness

As humans, we rely on our sense of hearing to gain information, identify our surroundings, and—in general—make it through the day in one piece. While many of us take our sense of hearing for granted, there are a number of individuals who lack this ability completely. In fact, some experts suggest that there are as many as 28 million deaf individuals living in the United States. Over the past several decades, a number of models of deafness have been established, which identify how a deaf individual is viewed and treated. Currently, there are three models of deafness, including those that focus on medical, social, and cultural aspects.

Medical Model of Deafness

In the medical model, being deaf is often viewed as an undesirable trait that should be treated and avoided, if at all possible. In most cases, the medical model of deafness is favored by deaf people who lost their hearing after already mastering spoken language. In addition, deaf people who identify themselves as being either “hearing impaired” or “hard of hearing” may favor the medical model of deafness. Deaf people who subscribe to the medical model of deafness may seek the assistance of hearing aids or undergo invasive surgeries designed to restore their hearing. The acceptance of social welfare and entitlements are also supported by deaf people who adhere to the medical model of deafness.

Social Model of Deafness

The social model of deafness suggests that individuals who are deaf suffer disability as a result of their environment, not of their physical limitations. Social models of deafness often stress the importance of deaf education for individuals diagnosed with the condition, which should ideally start at a very young age. In fact, research suggests that children who receive deaf education starting at the age of four years will have an easier time communicating with both hearing and non-hearing members of the community than those who do not receive similar types of education. Deaf education often focuses on interaction with others who have similar

conditions and learning how to navigate in a society that is not designed for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Cultural Model of Deafness

Finally, cultural models of deafness often stress the beauty of being deaf, and view the condition as neither a physical ailment nor disability. The cultural model of deafness is often embraced by many members of the deaf community, who encourage members to be more outspoken on their condition. In the cultural model of deafness, deaf community members view the birth of a deaf child as a cause for celebration, and may travel cross-country to see the new infant. Many outspoken members of the deaf culture are committed to the use and development of sign language as a means of communication. Individuals who commit to the deaf culture model are typically unlikely to seek treatment or management of their condition, and may not receive education designed to improve their functionality in a hearing world.

Gadgets for the Deaf

Members of the deaf community have to find unique ways to do many of the tasks hearing people don't even think about, because their deafness prevents them from performing the daily tasks that require the use of hearing. As technology becomes more advanced, new gadgets are constantly being invented to help deaf people meet the challenges presented by their deafness and hearing problems. These gadgets are very useful, because they make life more convenient and enjoyable for deaf and hearing impaired people, and they can also enhance deaf education. They have become an important part of deaf culture today.

Alarm Clocks for the Deaf

One of the challenges members of the deaf community must find new ways to meet is how to wake up at certain times without the use of an alarm sounding. Now, there are alarm clocks that are specially made for the deaf and hard of hearing. These alarm clocks come in several different forms, including extra loud alarm clocks, vibrating alarm clocks, and alarm clocks with flashing lights.

Vibrating Watches and Timers

Another device that can help deaf and hearing-impaired people keep up with their daily schedules is the vibrating watch or timer. This device can be used as a reminder for showing up for appointments on time, taking medications, refilling parking meters, and other purposes. It can also serve as wake-up alarm for those deaf people who are not heavy sleepers.

VV-Talker

The VV-Talker is a great device that can improve the communication skills of deaf children and facilitate deaf education. This compact toy-like device imitates the actions of speech and displays the vibrations of sounds on a screen. Deaf children can learn to speak more accurately by producing vocal vibrations that are similar to those displayed on the screen. The VV-Talker can provide valuable deaf education for children anytime and anywhere.

TV Listener Infrared Stereo System

People who are affected by deafness or hearing impairment may turn on the volume extra loud when they watch television. This can be a problem when family members or housemates may be trying to sleep or study, and they may be bothered by the loud sounds from the television. The TV Listener allows one member of a household to listen to the television at higher volumes than the others. It ensures that deaf people will be able to watch their favorite television shows without disturbing their housemates. The TV Listener is an essential device for members of deaf culture who want to be able to enjoy television programming without disturbing those who live with them.

Door Knock or Doorbell Signalers

Another problem that is often experienced by members of the deaf community is that they cannot hear the sound of visitors knocking on their doors or pressing their door bells. To solve this problem, they can purchase a door knock or doorbell signaler. This device can provide notification in one room or several rooms by making the lights flicker or by other means.

Sign Names

Sign names are a unique aspect of the deaf culture, as they are a short and quick way to recognize someone by name. As those who are deaf use sign language, often one of the first words they learn is their own name. American Sign Language ASL is the primary language used in the deaf community throughout the United States and is learned by the hearing impaired as well as those who wish to communicate with them. The sign language alphabet consists of using the fingers to manually spell out each letter of the alphabet. Many in the hearing community want to know how to learn sign language so they can communicate with hearing impaired friends, and they often begin with the alphabet. A sign language dictionary takes the novice student from finger spelling words to using one sign for a single word. This is how it

works with sign names. With a sign name, someone is recognized by a quick word, or symbol, rather than needing to finger spell all the letters of his or her name.

Those in the hearing community that want to know how to learn sign language will find that the best teacher is someone hearing impaired. Sign names are not created by the hearing individual, but are given to him or her by someone from the deaf community. Knowledge of the sign language alphabet is still the basic tool for those learning the language, but a sign name will ensure that you are easily recognized. The sign name will be a word that is commonly found in ASL, however, you will want to ensure that the name is based upon a pleasant rather than negative characteristic.

As those who use sign language will give you a sign name, it is often due to a trait or feature that you have. A hearing teacher who works with deaf children, who is known for a friendly disposition, may be referred to as happy, smiles, or sunshine. Someone who has a downbeat trait or feature may be given a negative name, especially if it is children who are bestowing the honor, so it is important to have deaf friends that are looking out for you. An ASL dictionary will have the image of any sign name given, and you can easily learn how to sign it. Those who want to know how to learn sign language will find that dictionaries, videos, tutorials, and communicating with members of the hearing impaired community are most effective.

Sign language is the basic building block for the deaf community. It is the tool used for communication as well as developing literacy. Though the sign language alphabet can help someone new to the community to spell out words they are unsure of, it is time consuming and laborious. By using a sign language dictionary, you can familiarize yourself with signs that are easier to perform, understand, and those that express greater emotion. As you become a member of the deaf community and gain acceptance, it will not be long before you are given your own, unique sign name as well.

History of Sign Language

People have been using hand gestures to communicate since thousands of years ago. Nonetheless, the earliest hand signal systems were not developed enough for the deaf to communicate on a more profound level. It was not until the Renaissance period that scholars began to develop ways to educate the deaf, and their efforts laid the groundwork for the invention of the sign language.

In the 17th century, a Spanish priest by the name of Juan Pablo Bonet published a sign language dictionary and book demonstrating a manual sign language alphabet system. This system consisted of hand-shapes that corresponded to various sounds of speech, and it was used with different methods of reading, speech-reading, and writing for educating the deaf. In 1771, Abbe de L'Epee, a French priest, established a free public deaf school called the National Institute for Deaf-Mutes. Many deaf children from across France attended the school, and they communicated with different signing systems. L'Epee used his students' signs to develop a standard sign language, and this language is referred to today as the Old French Sign Language.

Deaf education began to take root in the United States during early 19th century. Dr. Mason Fitch Cogswell, a prominent physician from Connecticut, wanted to find a way to communicate with his deaf daughter Alice. He discussed with his neighbor, Dr. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, about finding a way to teach deaf children how to learn sign language. With the help of his influential friends, he managed to raise enough funds to send Dr. Gallaudet to Europe to study sign language.

Dr. Gallaudet visited the deaf school that was founded by Abbe L'Epee, and he stayed there for several months to study signs and educational methods. After he was sure that he could teach deaf children how to learn sign language, he decided to return to the US. Accompanying him was Laurent Clerc, one of the most capable instructors in L'Epee's school, and the two men worked together to establish the American School for the Deaf in 1817. Gallaudet studied his students' signing methods and used them in combination with the French sign language to create the American Sign Language or ASL.

The American Sign Language alphabet is based on the English alphabet, and therefore, it can only be used in English-speaking countries. Deaf people from a country that uses a different alphabet system need a different sign language alphabet. Although ASL is the most widely used sign language in the world, it is by no means a universal language. In the early 1970s, the World Federation of the Deaf published a sign language dictionary called Gestuno: International Sign Language of the Deaf, which consisted of around 1,500 signs. Gestuno is influenced by ASL and European signs, and it has been the language of choice for many international events, such as the Olympics for the Deaf.

Presently, there are many educational materials that provide excellent instructions on how to learn sign language. Those who wish to learn sign language can start by getting a sign language dictionary or book, or attending a sign language course.

Deaf FAQ

If a person is deaf they have a disorder which affects their ability to hear. Deafness is the partial or complete inability in regards to hearing. People who have deafness view the world differently than those who can hear as they have to communicate in different ways. The following provides insights to questions frequently asked about deafness. There are also links provided for resources to learn more about deafness.

Is deafness genetic?

There is a lot of hearing loss that can be traced back to genetics. There have been some genes which have already been identified as causes of deafness, and research is continuing to identify more genes related to deafness. There are causes of deafness however that are not genetic as well.

Can someone develop deafness late?

Yes. Late deafness occurs after a person learned a language and they are no longer considered a child. This is common and can happen for various reasons which range from sudden deafness to deafness that cannot be explained.

What does closed captioned for the Deaf mean?

Often times the words “closed captioned for the Deaf” are said or heard via a web video, television show, regular video, or a movie. Captioning allows for the deaf or those people who are hard of hearing to know what is being said with words being placed on the medium. Closed captioning is one of two captioning types. The other type of captioning is open caption.

What does the acronym CART mean?

CART stands for “Communication Access Real-Time Translation” and it is something like captioning. It provides the deaf community with written words to accompany a spoken speech. CART benefits those who are hard of hearing and deaf who cannot use an interpreter.

Are there any forums or discussion boards for the deaf community?

Yes. There are forums and discussion boards available online for the deaf community. These are places where you can connect with others, share experiences, and discuss anything related to deafness. To find a deaf community forum simply perform an online search and join the one or various forums that interest you.

Are there any famous deaf people?

Anyone can be famous, including deaf people. Famous deaf people include: Marlee Matlin, Anthony Natale, Amy Ecklund, and Deanne Bray, to name a few.

Are there any words viewed as negative by the deaf culture?

At some point we have all heard the saying “sticks and stones.” We also have learned that words can and do hurt sometimes. In deaf culture there are words that can be harmful if used because they create a negative impression in the mind of the reader. Words viewed as being negative by the deaf culture include: dummy, deaf-dumb, deaf-mute, and handicapped to name a few. When communicating with the deaf culture, just as with any human being, think before you speak.

Can a parent provide deaf education for their child at home?

Yes. With the proper resources a parent can provide deaf education at home for their child. In fact, many parents of deaf children choose at home deaf education rather than traditional deaf education.