



# Communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing

*Achieving access for all*





## Communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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.





- 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](http://www.rnid.org.uk)** and from Croydon Hearing Resource Centre on **020 8686 0049**.