

Campus Safety

And the Deaf Community Working Together

If your campus has students who are deaf or hard of hearing, your Public Safety department needs to become aware of some basic information about deafness in order to serve those students well. Public Safety officers may interact with deaf students in a variety of situations:

- Reporting a theft
- Emergency medical situations
- Reporting items lost or found
- Parking violations
- Requests for services

Let's start with some basic information about deafness and deaf culture. It is important to know that there is a difference in the degrees of deafness that people may have.

Vocabulary

- *Deaf* is preferred by many students who identify with the deaf community whether they are deaf or hard of hearing.
- *Hard of Hearing* often is used when the person has some hearing or uses hearing aids. *Hearing Impaired* may be viewed by members of the deaf community as an insult because they feel they are not impaired. Deafness is their way of life, with their own culture and language (ASL – American Sign Language, which is recognized as a language with its own syntax and grammatical structure).

Be aware that there is a *Deaf Culture* and people who are deaf are proud of it. The deaf culture has similarities and contrasts with other cultures.

Communication options

Next let's discuss several successful ways to communicate with a deaf person. Choosing one of the modes below or using a combination of them is acceptable. Remember, the goal is to communicate.

Pantomime: We all use pantomime in everyday life. You may use your hands to describe the size, roundness, or placement of an object. Facial expressions sometimes are all that is needed to project a feeling or thought.

Speechreading: The ability to read lips varies among deaf people. Eye contact and proper lighting are important for effective communication. Deaf people need to see your face in order to read your lips. They depend heavily on certain factors that the hearing community

takes for granted, such as facial expression and eye contact. It is important not to over-exaggerate your lip movements. Talk slowly (normally) and clearly without over-exaggerating words.

Written communication can be used for short conversations when asking direct questions, giving direct answers, and giving directions. It is not well suited for lengthy communication, which can be exhaustive, especially dealing with matter that requires details. Another drawback of written communication is that it is time consuming. Written communication can be difficult, depending on the level of the deaf person's knowledge of standardized English.

Interpreting is an excellent choice for communication. The interpreter will convey your tone of voice and inflection through facial expression, body language, and intensity of the signs used. It is helpful to brief the interpreter on the nature of the incident/situation. Sit/stand next to the interpreter and face the deaf person. Speak to the deaf person, **not** the interpreter. Be aware that interpreters interpret ALL that they hear.

Sign language often is taught through community service organizations, local high schools, or colleges and is an excellent way to communicate with the deaf community. This will show your support and enable you to be more prepared in emergency situations.

TDD/TTY (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) is an essential device needed to allow the deaf community to communicate with you and your department via telephone. It is important to have a TDD or TTY but equally important to be sure your communications personnel properly and promptly answer the TDD/TTY.

Use of Interpreters

Learning to work with an interpreter is easy and an effective mode of communication. It is a good idea to establish guidelines or procedures to abide by when engaging interpreting services so that there is no confusion.

- Have a procedure set up for contacting an "on call" interpreter during the day and at night.

Meet with the interpreting services department or community agency to coordinate logistics.

- Have an understanding of the geographical boundaries and services the interpreter will be providing for your department and financial obligations. Should an assisting police department need interpreting services off campus to conclude its investigation, it is important to have a policy/procedure set up for when and where your interpreters will be used.
- Are the interpreters certified? Do they need to have special certifications to interpret legal proceedings in your state or on your campus?
- Interpreters will not be called upon as witnesses to testify as to what was said during an interview but may be called upon to testify that communication occurred.

Emergencies

During an emergency the ability to communicate not only saves time but may save a life. Training for emergencies is always good management foresight.

- Teach officers “emergency signs”: who, what happened, where, hurt/pain, hospital, ambulance, medicine, pills, how much, relax, and interpreter.
- Have a response procedure for “no-talk” telephone calls that are identifiable by location (ex: “Blue light” emergency call boxes, residence halls, offices etc.).
- During nighttime vehicle stops, position your flashlight between you and the driver, shining the light up or across so you both are illuminated and the light is not in either person’s eyes.
- Learn vehicle and traffic signs: license, registration, insurance card, stop sign, speeding, wait, and ticket.
- Student Rights/Miranda Warnings: Explain these in other words. For example: You have the right to remain silent = You do not have to answer my questions if you don’t want to. Some deaf students may understand the words but not the concept. A written form with an explanation of the rights helps maintain consistency and clarity.
- Handcuffing cuts off important modes of communication. You may consider using Handcuffing belts (which secure the person’s hands

in front) after the person has calmed down. They allow communication to resume and maintain officer safety.

Consider this...

Here are just a few “tips” for you to consider when communicating with a deaf person.

- The “deaf nod.” As you ask questions the deaf student nods his/her head “yes” during interviewing. This does not always mean “yes” to your question. The deaf person may only be indicating that he/she understands the words you are using, but may not understand the concept. Be sure your communication is clear. If it is not, use a different mode.
- Large, fast gestures/signing indicate the deaf person may be under stress and that emotional levels are high. To someone not knowing this, it may appear that the person is aggressive or out of control. It can be helpful to move the person to an isolated area and/or have the person sit down where communication can be slowed down and improved.
- Eye contact is a must for communicating with a deaf person (yelling does not help). Facial and body language also are important.
- Deaf students yield to sirens the same as any driver with the stereo on.
- You can reduce stress and gain cooperation by first explaining the actions you are going to take or need from the deaf person.
- To gain the attention of a deaf person, it is acceptable to flick the lights on/off, stomp your feet, bang on the table and/or wave your hand.

For more information on how to contact professionals in the campus safety field, as well as other topics covered by the NETAC Teacher Tipsheet series, visit NETAC’s Web site at <http://netac.rit.edu>.

For more information, contact:

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