

Etiquette Tips for Working with Deaf/Hard of Hearing Individuals

- When the exchange of information is complex, the most effective way to communicate with a native signer is through a qualified sign language interpreter. For a simple interaction, writing back and forth may be ok. However, this should be avoided if the person is in crisis.
- Follow the person's cues to find out if she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking. If you have trouble understanding the speech of a Deaf or hard of hearing person, let her know.
- When using a sign-language interpreter, look directly at the Deaf person, and maintain eye contact with them. Also, talk directly to the person ('What would you like?'), rather than to the interpreter ('Ask her what she'd like.').
- Before speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, make sure that you get his/her attention. Depending on the situation, you can extend your arm and wave your hand, tap her on the shoulder or flicker the lights.
- Speak clearly. Most people who are Hard of Hearing count on watching people's lips as they speak to help them understand. Avoid chewing gum, smoking or obscuring your mouth with your hand while speaking.