



TIPS TO USE WHEN WORKING WITH Newcomers Who Are D/deaf or Hard of Hearing

This tip sheet was created using resources and information from the Canadian Association of the Deaf, Ontario Council of Universities Accessible Campus resource, and Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters

- **Usage of “Deaf” vs. “deaf”.** The term “Deaf” with an uppercase “D” refers to members of a distinct cultural group whose first language is Sign¹. Some people who have complete or partial hearing loss may not identify as part of this group and may instead use the term “deaf” with a lowercase “d”².
- **Usage of “hard of hearing”.** This term refers to “individuals who have a hearing loss ranging from mild to severe and who use their voice and residual hearing – and occasionally sign language – for communication”³.
- **There are many different sign languages around the world.** As is true with verbal languages, sign languages vary along with the history of their country of origin and the people who sign them. In Canada, American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) are the most common sign languages. Even in other countries where English and French are official languages, there are different and often distinct sign languages, including British Sign Language and French Sign Language.
- **At events, programs and meals, let the D/deaf person(s) decide where they want to sit.** They are the best person to address their own accessibility needs. For example, if your event employs a sign language interpreter, the D/deaf person(s) needs to sit close enough to the interpreter to see them signing. Encouraging D/deaf guests and clients to choose their own seat gives them the freedom to best meet their own communication needs.

¹ Canadian Association of the Deaf, [Terminology - Canadian Association of the Deaf - Association des Sourds du Canada \(cad-asc.ca\)](https://www.cad-asc.ca/terminology).

² Ibid.

³ The Council of Ontario Universities, Accessible Campus resource. [Interacting with Persons who are Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing - Accessible Campus](#)

- **Make sure the person you're communicating with knows you're there before speaking.** A D/deaf person won't hear you coming up behind them and may not know if you're in a different room. To ensure that you don't startle them, tap them on the shoulder or calmly wave in their direction before beginning a conversation⁴.
- **Do not ask a friend or family member to interpret for a D/deaf person in formal service delivery settings.** It is unlikely that the friend or family member will know how to express concepts and terminology specific to the settlement sector in sign language. Additionally, the D/deaf client may feel that their right to privacy is not respected if a friend or family is interpreting for them. In professional environments, it is always best to book a trained sign language interpreter to support clients.
- **Use technology to your benefit.** Email, texting, instant messaging apps, online appointment systems, and online relay services are all tools you can use with people who are D/deaf or hard of hearing. Apps like Automatic Speech Recognition are also useful in supporting communication⁵.
- **In meetings and other group settings, make sure people take turns speaking.** It is difficult for a D/deaf person to lip read and following along with the conversation if more than one person is talking. Similarly, a sign language interpreter cannot translate more than one person's speech at a time⁶. A person who is hard of hearing may have difficulty following a conversation if there are several overlapping voices.
- **When communicating with a D/deaf person, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can clearly see your face⁶.** Do not put your hands over or otherwise obscure your face. In Deaf culture, facial expressions are a big part of communication. Additionally, the person may be relying on lip-reading to communicate with you.

Terminology to avoid when working with people who are D/deaf and hard of hearing

- Hearing-impaired
- Deaf-mute
- Deaf-dumb
- Many people who are part of the Deaf community do not consider themselves disabled⁷. This may vary from person to person, but it is good to be aware of when meeting someone who is D/deaf for the first time.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Center on Employment: [P2128_NTID_Tips_for_Comm_with_Employees.pdf\(rit.edu\)](#).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, [Ethnicity, Ethics and the Deaf World: Ethnicity, Ethics, and the Deaf-World | The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education | Oxford Academic\(oup.com\)](#)

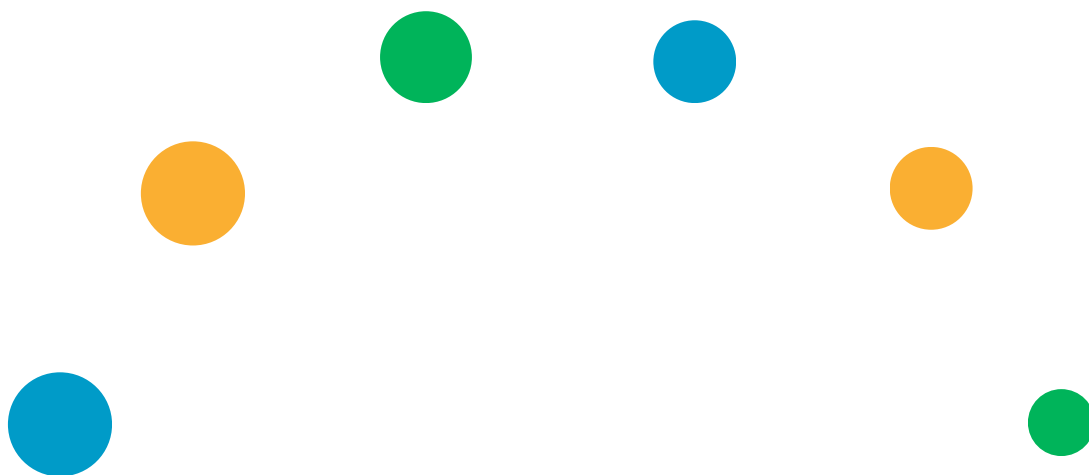
TIPS TO USE WHEN WORKING WITH SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

- **Sign language interpretation is a highly-skilled profession.** If you know that (a) D/deaf person(s) will attend a meeting or event, you need to build the cost of paying an interpreter into your budget. Travel expenses and time spent preparing for an event are also compensated.
- **The D/deaf person(s) attending your event may have an interpreter they prefer to work with,** especially if the event is taking place in their home community. Clarify with the individual(s) involved before booking an interpreter.
- **Sign language interpreters can be booked through both agencies and independent businesses.** Due to increasing demand for interpreters, their schedules often fill up quickly. It is recommended that interpreters are booked a minimum of 3 weeks in advance of your meeting or event⁸.
- **Hire interpreters who are active members of the Canadian Association of Sign Language Interpreters⁹ (CASLI),** who follow a Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. Members of CASLI will have graduated from a recognized ASL-English Interpreter Education Program.
- **Where feasible, provide interpreters with information and documents ahead of time so they can prepare.** Agendas, opening and closing remarks, speeches, research papers, tour scripts, slide decks – these are all useful tools for an interpreter to have before they arrive at your event or meeting. Providing documentation to an interpreter a minimum of two weeks before your event ensures they have time to read the materials.
- **If a meeting or event is longer than two hours, you will need to book more than one interpreter.** Interpreting is hard work, and it is important to build capacity into your event for interpreters to take breaks.

8 Ontario Council of Sign Language Interpreters.

9 For more information, visit the CASLI website: [CASLI - Why Hire a CASLI Member](#)

- **If a meeting or event relies on highly technical or niche language, ensure that is noted at the time of booking.** Some interpreters will be a better fit than others when interpreting, for example, at a software conference or Shakespearean play. Providing this information ahead of time ensures that the best person is matched with your event.
- **When working with a sign language interpreter, make sure that you look at and address the person you are communicating with and not the interpreter.** If you are having a conversation with a D/deaf person, then that is the person you need to face and make eye contact with. The interpreter is there as a resource to facilitate your conversation.
- **An intervenor is different from a sign language interpreter.** An intervenor is a trained professional who “facilitates the interaction of [a] person who is deafblind with other people and the environment”¹⁰. They act as the “eyes and ears” of a deafblind person¹¹.
- **The D/deaf person(s) attending your event may have an interpreter they prefer to work with,** especially if the event is taking place in their home community. Clarify with the individual(s) involved before booking an interpreter.



¹⁰ Deafblind Network of Ontario, [What is an Intervenor \(deafblindnetworkontario.com\)](http://deafblindnetworkontario.com).

¹¹ Ibid.