

Jessica Harris Interpreting Services, Inc.

Providing Quality & Professional Sign Language Interpreting Services to Florida since 2004.

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Before Your Interpreter Arrives: Some Do's & Don'ts

Deaf people depend very heavily on their eyes to understand what people are saying.

It is vital that you take some simple steps to help them *see* what you are saying.

Do get the deaf person's attention before you begin to speak, and don't start speaking without it. It is perfectly acceptable to tap a person lightly on the shoulder or arm or to wave a hand or small piece of paper gently in the person's direction to attract his or her attention.

Do try to converse in a quiet place. Don't assume the background noise makes no difference. Use your voice, but don't shout. Many deaf people can get some information through sound, but shouting distorts both the sound of words and lip movements. Highly skilled Lip Readers still only receive less than 30% from the lips.

Do not use family members or friends as an interpreter. Even if they are skilled enough to sign their own thoughts they might not possess the necessary skills to interpret and are often too emotionally or personally involved to interpret "effectively, accurately, and impartially." This is a liability and can cause problems in maintaining a person's right to privacy and confidentiality.

Do speak and enunciate clearly and normally, but don't exaggerate your lip movements. Do use facial expressions and body language to clarify your message. Don't be embarrassed to be expressive.

Do have pencil and paper for simple English questions, and use visual aids as necessary until your interpreter arrives. The average deaf person reads English below a 4th grade reading level. ASL is a complex visual-spatial language that shares no grammatical similarities to English.

Do speak at a normal rate when you are working with an interpreter. If the interpreter needs you to clarify or repeat any information, he or she may ask you questions. Speak directly to the Deaf client and speak in first person. Avoid such phrases as "Tell her" and "Explain to him." Be aware that the interpreter will try to position her/himself next to you, so that the Deaf client may benefit from your non-verbal/non-manual cues.

Do use some Open-ended Questions that solicit more than a yes or no answer to determine how much the deaf person understands. Rephrase sentences don't just repeat the same words over in the same sequence. Be sensitive to whether a deaf person is understanding or just being polite and nodding without following what you're saying. Don't assume that a bland expression implies a deaf person is catching what you say or a nod to a yes/no question means they understand.

Do stand close to the deaf person. Don't let any object obstruct the person's view of you. Face the deaf person and maintain eye contact. Make sure the deaf person can clearly see your mouth and face. Don't chew gum or hold your hands in front of your mouth while talking. Stand in a well-lighted place. Don't stand with your back to a light source such as a lamp or window. This throws your face into a shadow and makes it difficult to see clearly.

Professional interpreters have a strict Code of Professional Conduct and all interpreted information is confidential. www.RID.org
More information on the ADA and working with interpreters & deaf clients may be found at www.JHinterpretingservices.com

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