

Guidelines for Effective Communication with Deaf, Late-Deafened, and Hard of Hearing People

MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing:

BEFORE the conversation starts:

- Ask the person what is the best way to communicate with her or him.
- Get the person's attention. For a deaf or a late deafened person, a wave from a distance or a gentle tap on the shoulder is usually sufficient. A hard of hearing person may also benefit from this procedure, but calling the person's name may also help.
- Keep your face and mouth visible –don't turn your head or cover your mouth.
- Remove gum, cigarettes, food, or other objects from mouth. Speechreading is easier if the speaker's mouth area is free of objects.
- Be sure your face is adequately lit.
- Be aware of light sources. Windows or other bright light sources can create shadows on your face. This can make speechreading or watching signing more difficult.
- Face the person directly when speaking.
- Talk directly to the person –not to the interpreter, the CART reporter or companion.
- Negotiate comfortable conversation space.
- Only one person should speak at a time.
- Use an assistive listening device/CART or Interpreter Services if appropriate. If a hard of hearing person has hearing aids or assistive listening devices, give the person opportunity to adjust equipment.
- If assistive listening device/CART or Interpreter Services are not available, use paper and pen to assist with the communication process if needed.
- Reduce background noise or move to quieter location.
- Maintain eye contact. Eye contact facilitates direct communication.
- When working with special populations such as the elderly or children be sure they can see you clearly, if they wear glasses for daily activity make sure they have them on. For more information about working with special populations please contact the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

DURING the conversation:

- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. If it appears that you are not being understood, slow down your pace.
- Use short sentences.
- Use normal volume. A person using a hearing aid will not always benefit from increased volume. Hearing aids may be worn by deaf people to help with environmental sounds, not speech.
- Be ready to reword phrases if necessary.
- Use medical and legal terms with simple explanations of terms that are not understood.
- Keep movement to a minimum while speaking. Pacing, turning away from speaker, or covering your mouth while talking may make speech-reading or hearing with a hearing aid more difficult.
- Use facial expression and gestures when appropriate. These "clues" can fill in missing gaps or help with the "tone" of your message.
- Give the person a cue when changing subjects—give key words for new topic.
- To Be Sure You Understand Each Other
- If either person does not understand ask the speaker to rephrase.
- Verify Information
 - Confirm dates, names and other important details
 - Ask a question to see if you are understood
- Write down information or key words.
- Be aware that accents or slang may be difficult to understand.
- As the conversation ENDS:
- Offer to summarize. This is another opportunity to make sure that person has understood the conversation.