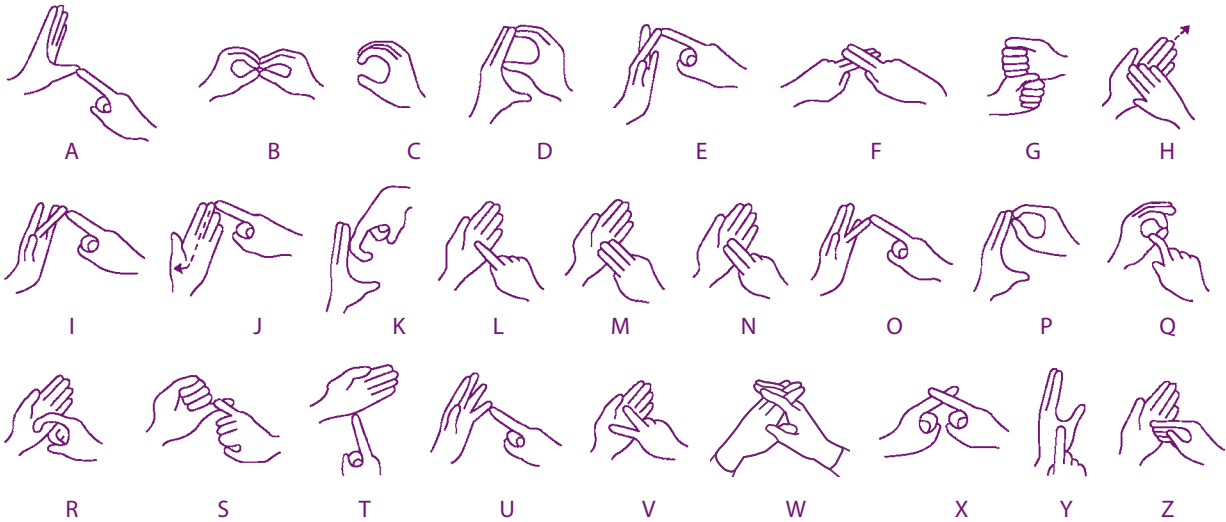

A Guide to Deaf Awareness in the Workplace

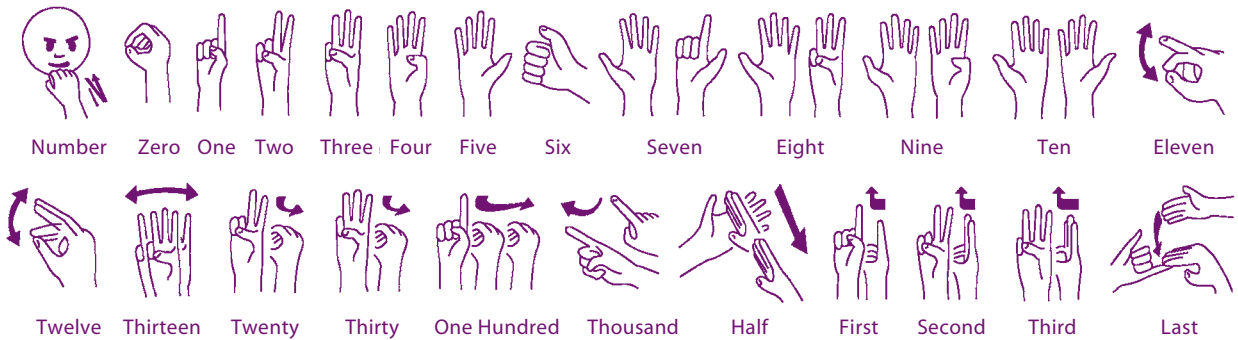
Employing Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Basic Survival Signs

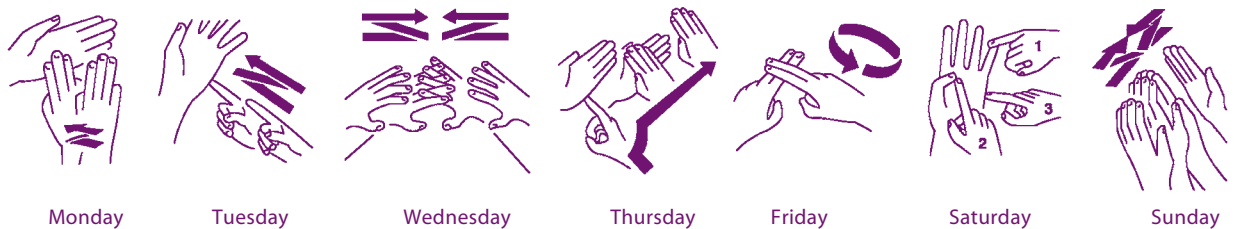
Finger-Spelling Alphabet



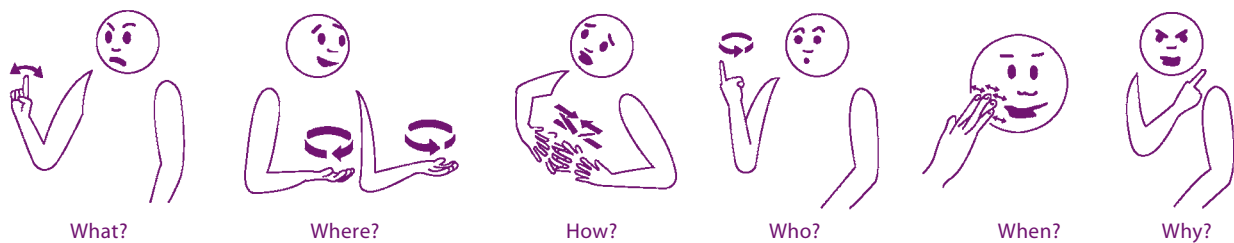
Numbers



Days of the Week



Questions



Contents

Basic Survival Signs	2
Introduction	4
Deafness and Communication	5
Recruiting Deaf Workers	6
Using your Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) Access to Work	
Interviewing Deaf Candidates	7
Successful candidates	
In the Workplace	8-9
Health and Safety Job instructions and training Using the telephone Dealing with customers Fitting in with others	
Hints on Successful Communication	10
Other Useful Signs	11



Introduction

This booklet gives information and advice about recruiting and employing people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Disability does not mean inability. Many deaf people are highly intelligent and have often also developed extra skills such as effective communication and high levels of concentration and awareness to help them succeed in their daily lives.

Where there are practical barriers in the workplace, there are usually practical solutions that need not be difficult or expensive. Often all that is needed is consultation, some common-sense and, perhaps, a little imagination, to enable a deaf employee to make as valuable a contribution to your business as their hearing colleagues.

Much of the advice may already be familiar to those employers who in the past have generously provided short work experience placements for our College students. We value this co-operation enormously, and the many successful placements achieved are a credit to the enlightened organisations who offer such job opportunities.

To those reading this information for the first time, we hope that it will help overcome some misconceptions, and that you will be encouraged to give deaf people an equal opportunity to show what they can do in the workplace.

Please call us anytime if you would like to discuss anything in this booklet, or if you think you may be able to help in offering work experience for our students. Please contact: Employment Liaison Department, Doncaster Deaf Trust, Leger Way, Doncaster, DN2 6AY Tel: 01302 386711 or 01302 386712

If you feel your organisation would benefit from some Deaf Awareness Training please contact: Sign Language Department, Doncaster Deaf Trust, Leger Way, Doncaster DN2 6AY Tel: 01302 386720 ext 236. This is a great way of fulfilling an employer's obligation as part of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

If you require any information on how to book an interpreter/Communication Support Worker (CSW) please contact: Communication Support Team, Doncaster Deaf Trust, Leger Way, Doncaster, DN2 6AY Tel: 01302 386720 ext 277.



Deafness and Communication

In the UK today, approximately 9 million people have a clinically significant hearing loss. Included are people who have been born deaf, those with very little experience of spoken language, and those who, because of diseases, accident or injury, have lost all or part of their hearing after acquiring language.

So there are varying degrees of hearing loss, and not everyone who is said to be 'deaf' has no perception of sound. Many people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment usually are able to communicate in normal circumstances, and only find difficulty when there are extraneous factors such as background noise or if people are talking all at once (ie training, meetings). Their ability to participate in everyday life can be enhanced through technical resources such as hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Those who are born deaf, or who have become deaf before acquiring language, may have little or no speech. Others who have severe hearing loss may have speech which may be difficult to understand at first, but which becomes increasingly intelligible with familiarity.

Having limited speech does not mean having no language. For many who are born deaf, their first language is British Sign Language (BSL), a highly developed visual and gestural method of communication which can convey precise information to the same extent as spoken language.

Finger-spelling is also widely used by profoundly deaf people. It consists of spelling out each word letter by letter, using different configurations of the fingers. The finger-spelling alphabet and some BSL signs that will be useful in the workplace are shown in this booklet.

Lipreading plays a significant part in a deaf person's ability to understand oral communication, although even the most proficient lip readers may receive less than half the information that the speaker is hoping to convey.

Communication is a two-way process, and a lack of understanding is often on the part of the hearing person rather than the deaf one. Hearing people need to be aware of practical considerations so that messages are presented in a way that facilitates rather than hinders communication.

Finally, in recognising typical deaf characteristics and methods of communication, it is also important to remember that each deaf person's needs, abilities and attainments are likely to be different. Individuals need to be treated as such, and generalisations and stereotyping should always be avoided.



Recruiting Deaf Workers

People are the key to success in any organisation, and most good employers recognise that adaptable and committed people are the most valuable resource they have. Because people are so important, it makes sense to ensure the widest possible choices when you are looking to fill your jobs.

Recruiting and developing people on the strength of their ability, and avoiding false stereotypes, is simply good management practice. If you exclude deaf or hard of hearing people from your recruitment thinking, you could be missing out on the contribution of potentially valuable employees.

Using your Job Centre Plus

When you have a vacancy to fill, talk to the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) who can be contacted through your local Job Centre Plus. DEAs are available to help people with disabilities, both those who already in employment and those who are looking for work.

The DEA can also advise employers about developing effective policies and practices in employing people with disabilities.

The help the DEA can offer includes:

- Help to contact suitable deaf or hard of hearing job seekers through the Job Centre Plus
- Advice about the practical considerations of employing someone who is deaf
- Communicator support at interviews
- Help towards the cost of special equipment or adapting of premises
- Continuing support after you have recruited someone who is deaf or hard of hearing
- Advice on the current Disability Discrimination Act



Interviewing deaf candidates

When you invite a deaf or hard of hearing candidate for an interview, check whether any special communication support is needed, such as a sign language interpreter, or a lip speaker. Lip speakers convey information to lip readers without using their voice. They produce clearly the shapes of words, the flow rhythm and phrasing of natural speech, using facial expressions and natural gestures to aid communication. Because the candidate has to concentrate on the lip speaker short periods are advisable.

Most candidates who wish to have a communicator with them at the interview will arrange this for themselves. Very often this will be done through the Employment Service, which pays for a communicator to attend the interview.

When interviewing, remember these points:

- Position yourself so that light falls on your face, it is almost impossible for someone to lip-read if you are in front of a window because of the glare
- Look directly at the interviewee, maintain eye contact
- Don't cover your mouth with your hand
- Don't shout – speak a little more slowly and distinctly than you would normally
- Be patient if you are not immediately understood. Rephrase what you said rather than just repeat yourself; some people may have difficulty in lipreading certain words
- Write it down if necessary

Talk about what the candidate can do rather than what they can't, but don't shy away from discussing how they think their deafness might affect them at work – they will be expecting you to ask.

If you conduct recruitment tests, ensure that deaf people are able to compete on equal terms with hearing candidates. For example, allow time for adequate explanation from a communicator to be given about the tests and what is required.

Successful candidates

It is often helpful if you can arrange for a successful candidate to have a preliminary visit to where they will be working. This offers the opportunity to meet colleagues, see the work environment, and discuss any practical considerations before actually starting the job. (A communicator may need to be booked).



In the Workplace

Some employers are understandably apprehensive about how a deaf person will cope in the workplace. The following practical advice aims to answer some typical questions, overcome some misconceptions, and help both the employer and the deaf person to communicate and to work together effectively. For some profoundly deaf people where English is their second language, some of the paper work may need to be modified: a communicator can facilitate this if necessary.

What about health and safety, fire alarms etc?

Rules, regulations and instructions about fire and other emergency procedures are usually well documented in an efficient workplace. On the first day of starting the job, procedures can be explained fully in a way accessible to the deaf or hard of hearing person and a personal copy of regulations and procedures given to the deaf employee for their future reference.

Fire alarms or other emergency warning bells can be heard without difficulty by deaf people who have some hearing and use a hearing aid. For those who are profoundly deaf, there are easily workable options such as:

- Nominating a hearing person to be responsible for alerting deaf colleagues in an emergency, or
- Wearing fire alerters that vibrate in response to an emergency signal, or
- Providing flashing lights linked to alarm systems in all accessible areas

Operating machinery should present few problems. Many deaf people have sensitivity to movement and vibration. If machinery is not running correctly, a deaf operator will usually be able to recognise this and seek help. If there is concern about recurring difficulties, a hearing colleague could act as a 'buddy' to the deaf worker, and help to monitor what is happening for a while.

Communication Technology

In a job that involves driving a vehicle, a deaf employee can stay in touch using a 'minicom' – a special portable telephone that links into a normal telephone network and sends and receives displayed text messages and mobile phone texting. Some emergency services have facilities that can be used by deaf people in an emergency. The AA has a dedicated SMS number.

A textphone can also be used through 'Typetalk', the national telephone relay service. Using a special number that links to a Typetalk operator, a deaf person can type a message which is read by the operator to a hearing person as it is being typed. When the hearing person speaks, the operator types the words back to the deaf person via the textphone. Electronic mail and text messaging has improved communications and enhanced job prospects for the deaf community.

Typetalk telephone number if you are a hearing person who wants to talk to a deaf person: dial 18002 followed by the number. If you are a deaf person who wants to talk to a hearing person: dial 18001 followed by the number.

Contact your DEA at the nearest Job Centre Plus for advice about adapting your premises or to discuss the equipment needs of a deaf employee.

How would a deaf worker cope with job instructions and training?

To help supplement guidance that has been given verbally, key instructions can be provided in writing and kept by the employees for reference. It is helpful to include a list of the commonly used terminology so that the worker can become familiar with the everyday vocabulary of the workplace. Communication support might be available for day-to-day work.

For formal or group training courses, consider using a communicator/interpreter or a note-taker for the more important course elements. Some forward planning such as consideration of seating arrangements, levels of background noise, and how visual aids might be used, will also help a deaf worker get the most from a training session. Regular breaks as levels of concentration required are intensive.

Some, or all, of the costs of a communicator to help both with job induction and with initial training may be met by the Employment Service. Contact your local DEA at the Job Centre Plus.

What about using the telephone or SMS and E-mail?

Employees with some residual hearing can hear quite normally with the aid of an amplified telephone handset. Profoundly deaf workers can use 'minicom' text telephones in place of normal handsets, with access to the Typetalk mentioned earlier. The use of mobile phones texting or e-mails is a popular method of communication.

How will a deaf person be able to deal with customers?

A job that involves dealing directly with customers need not preclude a deaf worker.

Remember that most deaf people need to communicate with hearing people every day of their lives – using public transport, shopping etc. Many profoundly deaf people can lip-read, and, with the use of aids, those with residual hearing have little difficulty.

How will a deaf employee fit in with hearing workers?

A deaf worker can fit in and become part of a team as easily as anyone, providing there is some awareness and understanding from hearing colleagues. Getting rid of some of the misconceptions about deaf people can help hearing workers to be more confident and effective in working alongside deaf colleagues.

The 'buddy' system in which a nominated hearing worker acts as help and support can be very useful, particularly in the early days of employment when the deaf person is still unfamiliar with the job and may be lacking confidence. Very often hearing colleagues are keen to learn some basic sign language or finger spelling to help in communications.

It is important, too, that a deaf worker is included in all normal workplace functions such as overtime, training, and, not least, consideration for promotion on merit. Don't assume that because someone is deaf they cannot handle responsibility.

All these things will help the communication process and the deaf person's integration into the organisation.

And finally ...

Once a deaf person has started their job, it is important to keep in regular contact to check that practical arrangements are working. They will have their own ideas and opinions and will often be able to suggest simple and cost-effective solutions to everyday work problems.

Hints on Successful Communication

When speaking to a deaf person:

- Ensure first that you have their attention: tap gently on the shoulder if necessary
- Make sure that your face can be clearly seen and is not in shadow
- Maintain eye contact
- Don't chew
- Don't cover your mouth with your hand
- Don't shout – speak a little more slowly and distinctly than you would normally and don't exaggerate
- Use gestures and facial expressions to help convey meaning
- Use short but whole sentences as it is easier to understand words that are in context. If you are not understood straight away, try to rephrase what you said, rather than just repeat yourself
- Don't turn away while talking
- Ensure that you have been understood
- Be patient
- Don't be embarrassed about using a pen and paper if necessary; the important thing is to get the message across and keep messages short and to the point

When listening to a deaf person:

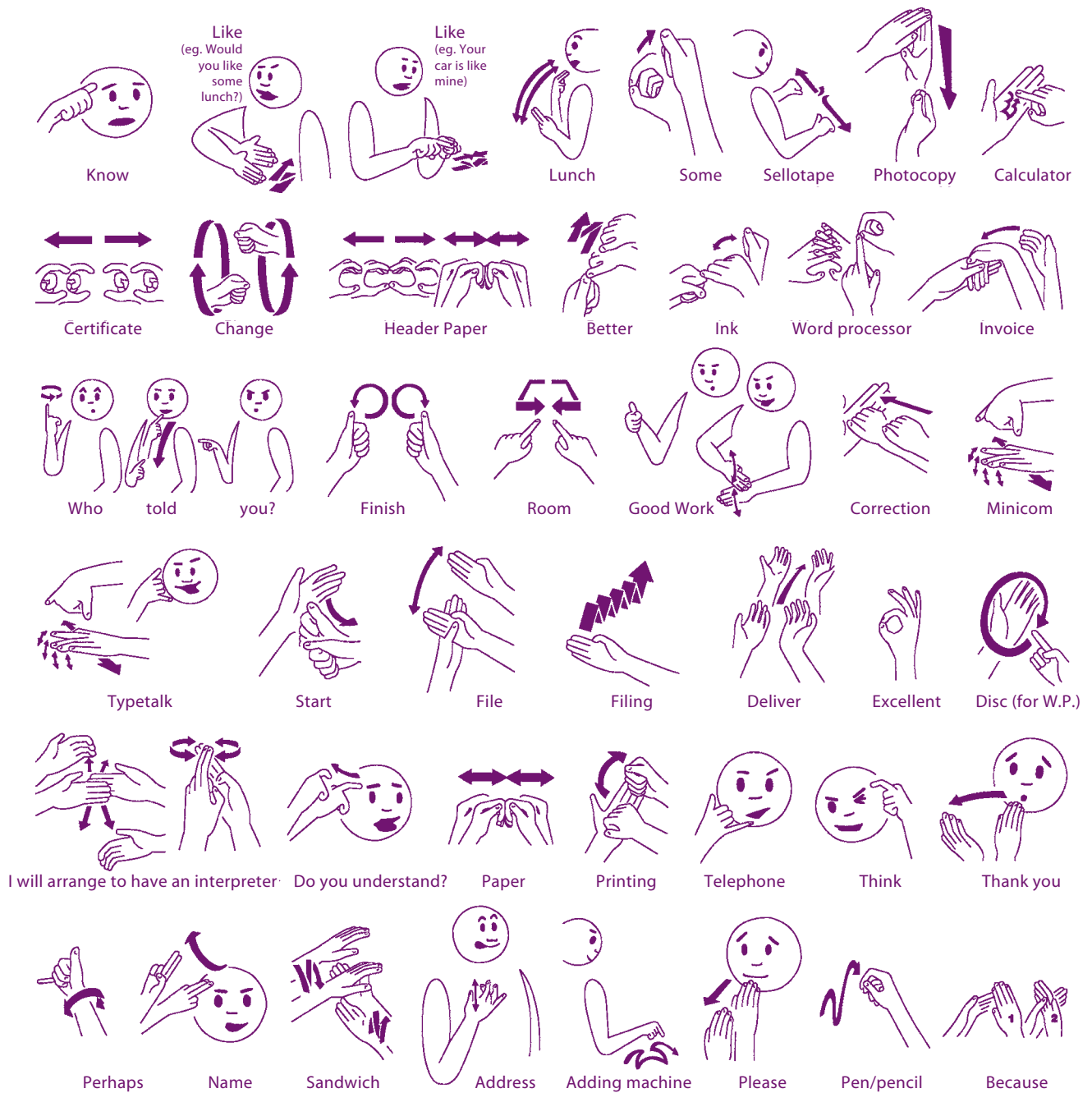
- Maintain eye contact
- Concentrate and listen carefully – if you don't understand first time, ask for the information to be repeated
- Don't be embarrassed if there is mutual difficulty in understanding at first – it will become easier as you become more familiar
- Recognise that deaf employees may lack confidence in the early days of their employment
- Be patient

When in a group that includes a deaf person:

- Make sure they can see what you are saying (seating in a circle can help)
- Include them in the conversation – tell them what you are talking about, explain what is happening and remember to talk one at a time

LEARN SOME SIGN LANGUAGE, IT CAN HELP MORE THAN YOU REALISE

Other Useful Signs



Useful Website Link



spreadthesign.com

'Spread the Sign' is a 'Leonardo da Vinci Language' project supported by the European Commission.

Doncaster College for the Deaf is working in partnership developing the new digital/visual dictionary of signs within vocational training.

The website 'www.spreadthesign.com' contains practical signed video clips of vocational words and phrases to help deaf people and their colleagues in work.



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