

## Factsheet

# Deaf Awareness

### What is this factsheet about?

There are around 10 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK – 1 in 6. Most will have lost their hearing as they got older, and will be able to access information in English, by reading and lip-reading, and may use subtitles on the television. This number is rising as the number of people over 60 increases.

Do not make any assumptions about the existence or absence of disabilities – being deaf or hard of hearing is just one of many unseen impairments.

This factsheet is to help you understand more about interacting with those who are deaf or hard of hearing. There are more sources of information at the end. If you are deaf or hard of hearing we would value your feedback to make this factsheet more helpful and relevant. See contacts below.

## Definitions

**Deaf** – A general description of people with any level of hearing loss.

**Hard of hearing** – People with a mild to severe hearing loss, often having lost their hearing gradually over a number of years.

**Deafened** – Those who were born hearing and learned to speak, then became severely or profoundly deaf due to illness or trauma.

**Deafblind** – Many people who are deafblind have a degree of hearing and vision, others are totally deaf and totally blind.

**The deaf community** – Many deaf people, particularly BSL users, consider themselves part of the deaf community, and may describe themselves as 'Deaf' with a capital D, to emphasise their cultural identity.

## Levels of hearing loss

**Mild** – Others may notice before the individual does, as they miss conversations, need the television turned up, and may tend to shout. Some may use a hearing aid or consciously lip-read.

**Moderate** – People will have difficulty hearing what is said without a hearing aid, particularly in noisy situations.

**Severe** – May have difficulty following conversation even with hearing aids. Many also use lip-reading, some

use sign language or may need other communication support such as written notes or fingerspelling of difficult words.

**Profound** – Some, but not all, may find hearing aids are of little if any benefit. Many are proficient lip readers under ideal circumstances. For many in the UK, BSL is their first or preferred language, some needing trained interpreters to interact with the hearing population.

## Ways to communicate

People who are deaf or hard of hearing choose to communicate in different ways, depending on their level of deafness and personal circumstances.

**Lip-reading** – Everyone lip-reads to some extent, especially in noisy situations. In direct conversation, facial movements give information to help you understand the meaning and context of what is being said. Many people with all levels of deafness use lip-reading, some relying on it totally.

- Establish if a deaf person can lip-read. Look directly at the person speak clearly and slowly. Do not shout or exaggerate lip movements as this may distort understanding.
- When talking to someone who relies heavily on lip-reading, it is important to remember that it takes skill and concentration, and can be very tiring. Many words look similar on the lips and some sounds produced in the back of the throat have no visible lip shape.
- Facial expressions and gesturing can help deaf people understand you. Ensure that your face is clearly visible, not obscured by anything such as hands, pens, clothing

or food, illuminated from in front, and not behind as that throws shadows on your face. Be patient, and if necessary repeat or rephrase as simply as possible.

- If difficulties occur suggest using written notes.
- Many deaf people prefer to use sign language; it is a language like any other with its own grammar. Interpreters should be provided if deaf people are present at meetings or in an official interview situation.
- If you are with a deaf person and an audible warning is given eg. the change of platform at a station or a fire alarm, make sure the person understands what is happening.

**Hearing aids** – Around two million people in the UK wear hearing aids, although it is estimated that a further five million would benefit from them. Hearing aids make sounds louder, but cannot fully restore hearing to severe or profoundly deaf people. They are battery operated and usually worn in or behind the ear. Hearing tests, aids and batteries are available free on the NHS, as well as being available for purchase through many companies.

## Finally

Avoid negative questions like:

What's wrong with you? Were you born like that or was it an accident? How long have you been like that?

- Focus on the positive, ask questions like:
  - What do you do? Where do you work?
- Just think which questions you would prefer to answer.

We should always try to emphasise the uniqueness and worth of all persons rather than the differences between people. Your efforts can do much to eliminate the 'them' and 'us' attitude that can prevent the integration of individuals with disabilities.

Contact for this factsheet: Sabrina Richards, Head of Diversity and Engagement.

If you would like to know more detail then please contact your nearest Disability Advocate  
[http://nhsbtweb/group\\_services/human\\_resources/equality\\_and\\_diversity/information\\_for\\_disabled\\_employees/disability\\_advocate\\_scheme.asp](http://nhsbtweb/group_services/human_resources/equality_and_diversity/information_for_disabled_employees/disability_advocate_scheme.asp)  
and request the detailed information from the **Business Disability Forum** of which NHSBT is a member.

**Further information** is available from:

[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk) (previously RNID)

[www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk)

[www.actiondeafness.or.uk](http://www.actiondeafness.or.uk)

[www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk) for children

[www.hearinglink.org.uk](http://www.hearinglink.org.uk) for hard of hearing people

[www.ukdeafsport.org.uk](http://www.ukdeafsport.org.uk)

For **carers** and anyone else who has anxieties about family, relationships, personal or financial matters we have our fantastic free confidential **Employee Assistance Programme, Employee Care managed by Capita independently from NHSBT**. You can telephone 0800 716017 to speak to someone and you can access a wealth of information on line. Please visit [www.employeecare.com](http://www.employeecare.com). To log in all you need to do is type the pin code 72992 into both the access code and password boxes. This is an incredibly valuable benefit to all staff and it's free to you as NHSBT employees!