

**Tip Sheet 10**  
**Library Accessibility: What You Need to Know:**  
**Accessibility for Patrons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

## Overview

Library staff often are not aware that a child or adult approaching them for assistance is deaf or hard of hearing until they begin to communicate. Deaf persons communicate in a variety of ways: speaking, writing, signing, gesturing, or a combination of these. People often assume that the deaf will use American Sign Language (ASL) or read lips. In reality, only a small number of those who are deaf know ASL, and few people are skilled lip-readers.

Assistive technologies, such as one-to-one or wide-area assistive listening devices, public TTYs/text telephones, and videophones help facilitate communication. Videophones allow a translator to sign conversations to viewers. These items are economical and the manufacturer subsidizes some, like the videophone.

Hearing dogs alert people to sounds unique to their environment, such as smoke alarms, stove timers, alarm clocks, babies crying, ringing phones, doorbells, unusual sounds that may indicate danger or emergencies, and to watch for dropped items.

Common requests that library staff members may expect are: questions relating to local education options for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, information about a variety of hearing differences and how to cope with hearing loss. Patrons may also ask how to request accommodations people may need in order to enjoy participating in library programs.

## Tips

- How should you request the attention of a deaf person? Gently touch a shoulder, or get in the line of sight and wave, or tap on the table or counter top. Staff should use the method with which they feel most comfortable.
- Position yourself for visibility.
- Look at and speak directly to the patron, not to an interpreter.
- Maintain eye contact at all times during the conversation. Don't look away at a computer screen or down at the desk top. Don't speak as you turn to retrieve materials. While patrons may not read lips, they can get cues from facial expressions. These cues let patrons know when staff have stopped speaking, signaling that it is their turn to talk.
- Speak naturally – don't exaggerate, shout, or speak slowly.

- Use short sentences.
- Repeat, rephrase, or spell words if not understood. For example, a patron may not hear the word “quarter” but they may hear “twenty-five cents.”
- Use gestures, write, or type back and forth on a computer using a program like Word, to add clarity to communication.
- Instant Messaging (IM) or other virtual reference services are accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. If the library uses IM or virtual reference services make an extra effort to market it to the deaf community.
- Train staff members who provide telephone services to receive and make calls using TTY or video relay services.
- Provide assistive listening devices, interpreter services, or real-time captioning services for public programs upon request.
- Provide print materials advertising the technologies and services that the library provides for patrons who are deaf and hearing. Place these items where they can be easily seen.

## **Resources**

Gallaudet University Library paper, *Communicating in the Library with People Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing* accessible online.

<http://library.gallaudet.edu/deaf-communication-libraries.shtml>