

Section: Exceptionalities
Topic: Hearing Impairments

This section is to introduce some incorrect perceptions that people without disabilities have toward people who have a hearing impairment and the negative attitudes that result. These can be overcome with an increased understanding of the facts.

After completion of the reading and homework assignment, you will know common myths that have created attitudinal barriers toward individuals with hearing impairments. You will also be able to give accurate facts about hearing impairments.

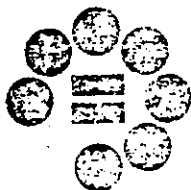
Beyond The Sound Barrier

THE DEAF COMMUNITY

THE POPULATION

There are approximately 1,700,000 deaf individuals living in the United States. Another 15,000,000 Americans have partial hearing impairments, ranging from mild to profound hearing loss. Most people will either have some hearing loss in their lifetime or will have a close family member experience a hearing loss. The process of aging, alone, is responsible for a good deal of hearing impairment. Many people will not even realize the extent of the loss or its effects and therefore will not seek appropriate advice. Most people with hearing loss will face attitudinal barriers. Only the severity will differ.

This booklet is written about those persons with severe hearing loss who are having problems achieving their full potential because of attitudinal barriers.



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COMMUNICATION

II-D3

The major handicap facing a person with a hearing impairment is one of communication. Unable to benefit from voice communication, deaf persons rely upon their eyes for signals which represent ideas. The most commonly recognized method of communication is lip reading. The deaf person can, with enough training and concentration, understand many spoken words by watching the lips and face of the speaker.

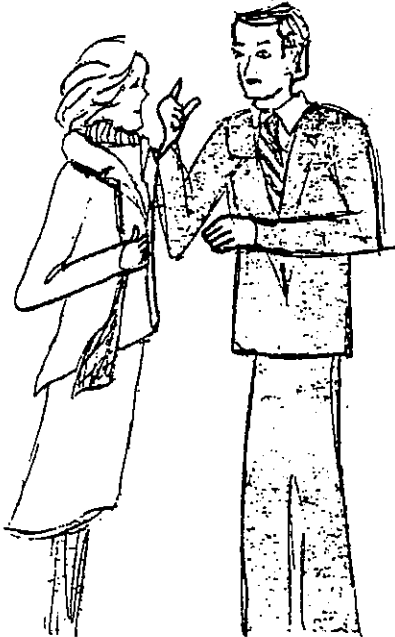
Another form of communication is done with the hands (manual). Here, thoughts are expressed by a combination of hand movements and positions. Manual communication (sign language) has many forms. Sign language dialects exist regionally within the U.S., and different spoken languages have different sign languages (Spoken French, Sign French). Where no sign exists for a thought, the word can be spelled using the manual alphabet. Each letter is formed by the hand (fingerspelling).

Deaf citizens also communicate with written language when lip reading and manual communication cannot be used effectively. Technology presently exists which allows standard telephones to be used with small "typewriter-like" instruments (called TTY's) that transmit printed words onto a panel. Both tele-

phone users must have this instrument in order to use the system.

When a hearing and deaf person begin to communicate, sometimes they use pad and pen to understand each other. Because many deaf people speak, sometimes only the hearing person writes his/her thoughts.

Whichever form of communication is used—lip reading, manual communication (sign language and fingerspelling) or written language—deaf citizens can express themselves and be understood by hearing citizens when both are willing to try. Communication is the important thing.



MYTH:

All deaf persons lack the ability to speak.

FACT:

Many deaf persons speak, have normal physical vocal ability, and learn to use their voices in speech classes. But deaf persons cannot automatically control the tone and volume of their voices like normally hearing people because they cannot hear themselves speak. Even with years of training, a deaf individual may have speech which is difficult, at first, for the listener to understand. Most people can understand "deaf speech" once they become accustomed to it. Some deaf persons are shy about speaking in public because of the negative reactions they have received before.

MYTH:

All hearing-impaired persons can read lips.

FACT:

All of us, to some extent, rely on lip reading to understand our language. But even a practiced deaf listener can only understand 30-40% of spoken sounds by watching the lips of a speaker.* For example, words such as "bump" and "pump" look the same on the lips, but have totally different meanings. As with any other skill, the ability to read lips varies among individuals. Although the most accurate mode of communication with deaf persons is sign language, pencil and paper can sometimes be used as an alternative. Keep in mind that your body language and facial expressions say a lot, too.

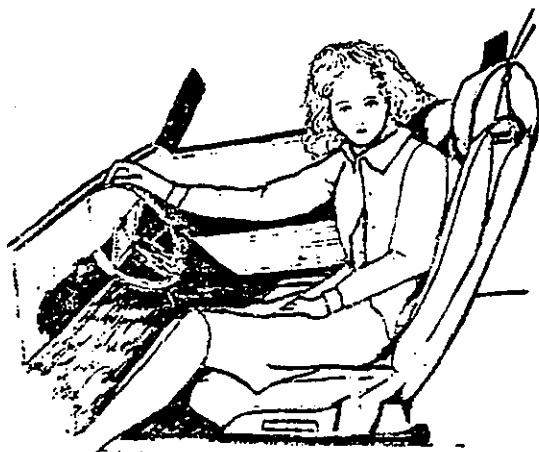
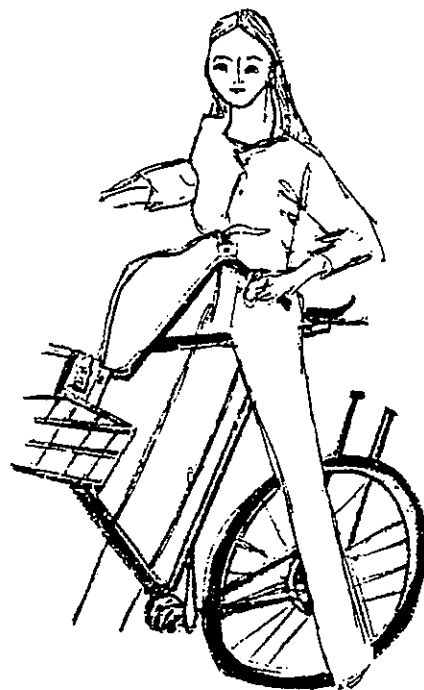


MYTH:

Hearing aids totally correct hearing impairments.

FACT:

Hearing aids are assistive devices which *improve* hearing in some individuals. The aids do not correct hearing. A hearing aid may enable a person to hear someone's voice, even though they may not be able to understand distinct words. The fact that someone is wearing a hearing aid does not necessarily indicate that the person can hear normally. A hearing aid merely lessens the degree of severity of a hearing loss.

**MYTH:**

Deaf people lead totally different lives than other people.

FACT:

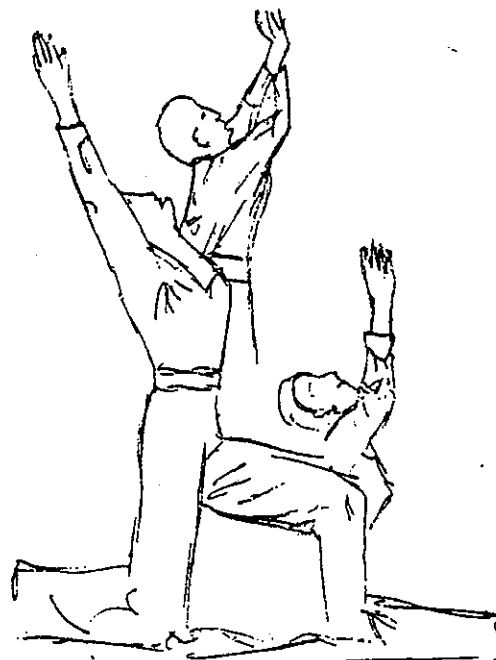
Most deaf individuals living at home occupy their time just like you. They go to work, marry and raise families, drive cars, use the phone, go shopping and pay taxes. Of course, individual differences exist. But chances are good that when you meet a deaf person, you will share several similar interests which you can explore together.

MYTH:

Deaf persons cannot appreciate the arts because they can't hear music, movies, etc.

FACT:

Anyone who has ever had the privilege to see a performance by the National Theatre of the Deaf will realize the error in the above statement. Throughout history, deaf individuals have participated in and contributed to the performing arts. (How about Beethoven, for example?) Captioning of movies and other audio-visual media would be helpful for deaf citizens, and this practice should be encouraged. But as long as there is rhythm and visual image, those with residual hearing and even those who are totally deaf can be valued patrons and performers of the arts.



WHEN YOU MEET A DEAF PERSON

1. Speak clearly and distinctly, but don't exaggerate. Use normal speed unless asked to slow down.
2. Provide a clear view of your mouth. Waving your hands or holding something in front of your lips, thus hiding them, makes lip reading impossible.
3. Use a normal tone unless you are asked to raise your voice. Shouting will be of no help.
4. Speak directly to the person, instead of from the side or back of the person.
5. Speak expressively. Because deaf persons cannot hear subtle changes in tone which may indicate sarcasm or seriousness, many will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and body movement to understand you.
6. If you are having trouble understanding a deaf person's speech, feel free to ask him to repeat. If that doesn't work, then use paper and a pen. Communicating is your goal. The method doesn't matter.
7. If you know any sign language, try using it. If the deaf person you are communicating with finds it a problem, the person will let you know. Usually your attempts will be appreciated and supported.
8. If a deaf person is with an interpreter, speak directly to the deaf person—not to the interpreter.
9. When talking with a deaf person, try not to stand in front of a light source (e.g., a window). The deaf person would find it hard to see your face, which would be silhouetted in the light.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The deaf and the hearing person have a common problem of communication. The deaf person relies on eyes and hands for language; the hearing person, on ears. Both have something to say and something to listen to. You can help improve the communication between deaf and hearing citizens. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Ask your church, civic organization or club to make provisions for sign language interpreters. Announce that the service is available so that hearing impaired people can request it.
2. When children ask about sign language that they see on television or in public, tell them that it is the language of the deaf and that many people talk that way.
3. When you see television shows, newspaper articles or magazines that portray deaf citizens as competent and able, send a letter indicating your support to the producer or publisher.
4. Encourage high schools, colleges and universities to offer courses in sign language. Such courses could be accepted as a foreign language requirement.
5. Support sponsors of television shows that are captioned or have sign language interpreters. Tell commercial sponsors that you are expressing your approval of them by using their products.
6. When you read or view a presentation portraying deaf people in a negative way (sick, unintelligent), write a letter stating your opinion to the involved newspaper, magazine, or television station.
7. Install a teletypewriter phone system (TTY) in your office or place of business. Advertise its availability.
8. Invite deaf citizens to give lectures or presentations at meetings, conferences, and workshops. Some will use their own voices and others will bring sign language interpreters.
9. When planning a meeting, remember that visual aids are very helpful to the deaf participant. If a film is planned, provide a written script, outline or summary of the film content.
10. Encourage friends and family to learn sign language.

DID YOU

KNOW?

There are approximately 1,700,000 deaf people in the United States. Another 15 million Americans have hearing impairments. Many of them are Senior Citizens. As people grow older their hearing often becomes less acute. A hearing aid can lessen the effect of a hearing impairment, but because it often distorts the sound, it cannot always restore normal hearing.

The greatest problem to deaf and hard-of-hearing people is communication. Being deaf does not affect one's physical ability to talk. The vocal cords are completely normal, but it is very difficult to learn to pronounce sounds and words that one has never heard.

People who lose their hearing after learning to speak have a reservoir of remembered sounds. They often have normal speech though they may have problems with volume.

People who are born deaf or lose their hearing very young usually do not have perfect pronunciation. Many prefer to communicate through sign language and writing.

Walk a Mile in Another Girl's
Shoes, San Francisco Bay Girl Scouts

(Hearing As She Hears)

II-D7

1. GETTING THROUGH - COMMUNICATION IS THE GOAL. FIND WAYS TO "TALK" WITH A DEAF PERSON.

- A. YOU'RE HURTING MY EARS. Speak at normal volume and speed unless asked to do otherwise.
- B. REPEAT. Don't pretend to understand when you don't. Ask the person to repeat.
- C. DIFFERENT. Be willing to repeat what you said if asked. Try saying it in a different way.
- D. SIGNING. If you know any sign language, use it.
- E. PEN IN HAND. Write notes to each other.

2. EYE TO LIP - MAKE IT AS EASY AS POSSIBLE TO READ YOUR LIPS.

- A. BUBBLE GUM. Keep everything away from your face so the person can see your lips.
- B. EYE TO EYE. Look directly at her.
- C. BODY TALK. Show your feelings with your face and body. She can't rely on tone of voice to tell you are joking.
- D. GLARE. Stand so the light is not in the person's eyes.

3. HEY, I'M OVER HERE - Look at her and speak directly to her -- NOT to her interpreter. If possible, let her face both you and the interpreter.

4. UNDERSTANDING - Some deaf girls learn to speak, but do not pronounce words perfectly or may speak too loudly or softly. Learning to talk when you cannot hear is a great accomplishment. Do not laugh or make fun of her mistakes. She should be respected for her efforts.

5. CARRY ON - Sometimes a deaf girl may make a non-sense sound. Since she cannot hear, she may be unaware of it. Ignore it and continue what you were doing.

6. SHOW ME - When you want to teach a deaf person how to do something, demonstrate as well as explain. (Example: Act out a game instead of only telling the rules.)

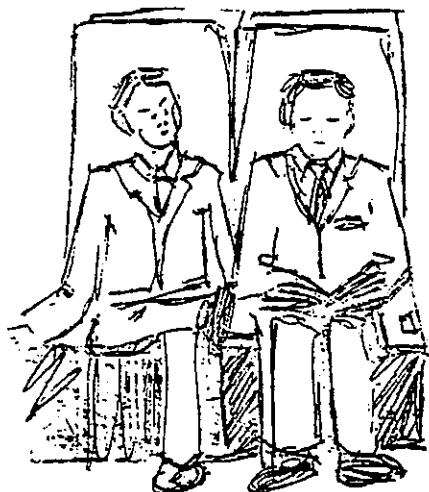
7. DOUBLE DOSE - When you sign, also say the word. The deaf person relies on both sign and lip reading to understand. If you are fingerspelling say the whole word, not each letter. Sign accurately; don't worry about speed.

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Assignment # _____
 Due Date _____
 Name _____

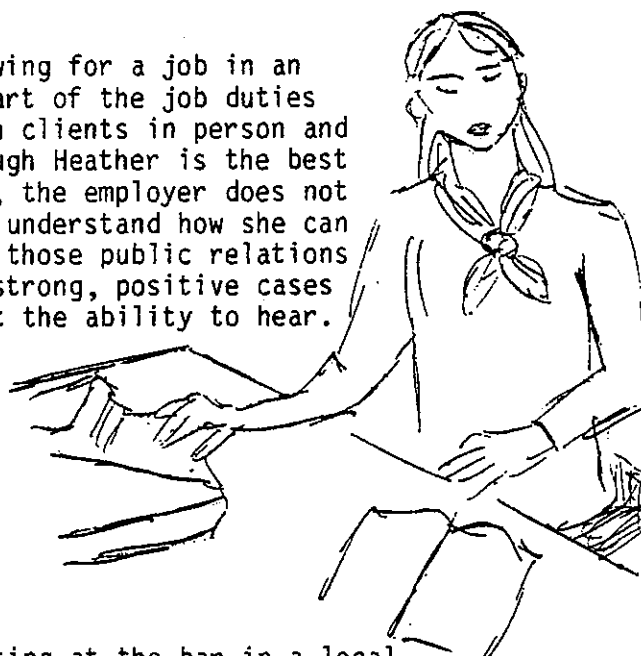
Below are three scenes that involve a person that has a hearing impairment. For each situation, answers the following questions. (Use a separate sheet of paper)

1. Which myths and attitudinal barriers do you recognize?
2. How do you think a person who has a hearing impairment should respond?
 How do you think she or he feels?
3. Briefly recreate the scene using facts instead of myths.



1. Jack is seated on a plane and is very involved in the novel he is reading. The man Next to him quietly asks Jack to move so he can get out into the aisle. Jack continues reading his book. The man asks again in a loud and unfriendly tone. Jack remains silent. The man very angrily elbows Jack in the ribs. Jack looks up, surprised.

Heather is interviewing for a job in an advertising firm. Part of the job duties require talking with clients in person and by telephone. Although Heather is the best qualified applicant, the employer does not hire her. He cannot understand how she can effectively perform those public relations duties and present strong, positive cases for the firm without the ability to hear.



Kevin is sitting at the bar in a local restaurant with a hearing friend who knows sign language. Kevin and his friend are having a discussion when the bartender comes up to take their drink orders. The bartender asks Kevin's friend, "What does he want?" The friend replies, "Why don't you ask him?"