



## Bar Council Equality and Diversity Guides

### Effective communication with those who are deaf or hard of hearing

People may be born deaf or become deaf traumatically or because of ageing.

**REMEMBER** the useful acronym GALA 'Greet - Ask - Listen - Act' when dealing with people with hearing difficulties

The following suggestions are designed to help improve communication with clients, colleagues and other persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

#### TIPS

##### *Before a meeting*

1. Ask how they like to communicate and what, if any, communication support they need (e.g. interpreter, notetaker, speech-to-text apps, auditory enhancement system).
2. Give enough time to book interpreters if needed and make any necessary funding application.
3. Send an agenda and any papers beforehand.

##### *Face-to-face meetings*

4. Prepare the meeting space.
  - Seating: can everyone see to lip-read?
  - Check lighting and ensure speakers are not sitting in front of a window (it makes lip-reading difficult).
  - Check background noise (it can affect hearing aids).
  - Test the technology. Check any auditory enhancement systems requested are working.
5. Face your client or colleague and draw their attention before commencing.
6. Start with gentle deaf awareness ground rules: for larger meetings, all participants should raise their hand before speaking and take turns.
7. Enforce the 'one speaker/one meeting' principle: make sure only one person speaks at a time. Remember someone who is lip-reading needs to know which person is speaking.
8. Give people time before moving to a new topic.

9. Check in regularly. Do not leave it to the end to check whether communication has been easy to follow. Check your client or colleague really understands what you have said as they could incorrectly indicate they have understood to speed up the discussions or because they are embarrassed or distressed.
10. Be patient.
11. Take lots of breaks – lip reading takes a lot of concentration.
12. Be aware:
  - many deaf people have tinnitus which can be distracting.
  - some deaf people take medication that can affect their concentration.
  - sounds such as 'n' and 'g' can be difficult to capture when lip-reading.
13. Talking to people who are deaf or hard of hearing:
  - Avoid shouting or talking loudly to your client or colleague as this appears aggressive and can be distressing.
  - Recognise body language can be perceived as aggressive.
  - Do not talk too slowly as this affects sound rhythms for those with a hearing impairment.
14. Avoid distractions that may cause your client or colleague to lose concentration.
15. Always repeat information if you need/have to turn your face away from your client or colleague – do not be afraid to write things down if this helps you to check they have understood your point.

#### *Video meetings*

16. Use the accessibility tools: check the meeting host has enabled captions and that speakers/interpreters can be pinned or spotlighted.
17. Turn on and check your camera. Can your face be seen clearly? If you are signing, can people see your hands?
18. Raise your hand before speaking or say your name so people can look at your face to lipread and/or pin the speaker.
19. While speaking, do not cover your mouth, eat, or chew gum.
20. Use the mute button. This limits background noise.
21. Enforce the 'one speaker' rule.
22. Use the comments to share information.
23. Raise your 'real' hand instead or as well as the 'hands up' button.

## Supplementary information with respect to the courts

### TIPS

1. Ensure in advance that the Court is aware of your client or colleague's hearing impairment/deafness and their communication needs.
2. Check if there is an induction loop or infra-red broadcast system at the court and that it is in working order.
3. Before the hearing ensure microphones are made available and are working.
4. Request that background noise (e.g. as air-conditioning) be limited as this can impair hearing.

For further information see the guides on the [NDCS website](#). Although NDCS assist children, their guides are equally applicable to adults. They can advise on the best loop and hearing enhancement systems as well as infrared systems that work with advanced hearing aids.

### Action on Hearing Loss Information Line:

- Telephone 0808 800 8880
- SMS 07860022888

The equality team at the Bar Council can offer advice or ask advocates who share or have an expertise in a particular disability for their assistance. Please contact: [equality@barcouncil.org.uk](mailto:equality@barcouncil.org.uk)

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