



Getting Started: Communication Strategies with Individuals who are Deaf

Target audience: *Mental Health professionals working with Deaf individuals who wish to learn more about communication strategies.*

Lipreading (or speechreading) is a lot more difficult than people usually think it is.

- Only 30% of phonemes are visible on the lips.
- The average deaf person only understands 5-10% through lipreading.
 - o The rest is guesswork, context clues, and environment.
- Speechreading requires high degree of competency in the spoken language.
- Many sounds are different but look the same
 - o Try mouthing “Olive juice”, “Island views”, and “I love you”
- Trying to speechread in stressful, technical, or complicated situations can hinder success of the effort.

Literacy skills

- The average deaf individual graduates high school with approximately a 4th-5th grade English reading level. (Their ASL competencies may be much higher).
 - o Written notes are generally not recommended as a means of communication, especially if the information is important.
 - o It often leaves the deaf person unable to understand mental health and health terminology.

Attention Getting

Acceptable attention getting techniques in the Deaf community may seem unusual or even rude to hearing people at first glance:

- o Tap or touch forearm, shoulder, knee (as appropriate)
- o Tap the desk or table to create a vibration.
- o Stomp a foot (when the flooring will carry a vibration).
- o Flick the light switch off and on.
- o When out of reach (or when at a distance), it's okay to wave a hand in person's line of sight (but don't wave it directly in front of or near their face).
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- Head nods may not necessarily mean “yes” or “I agree” but may simply acknowledge they are trying to process the message.
 - o Head nods can also be a learned coping skill to prevent people from getting frustrated or angry that they do not understand what is being spoken.
- Attempts to communicate directly (gestures, eye contact, ASL, drawing pictures, writing simple notes) are appreciated and can encourage client engagement.
 - o Deaf Interpreters (interpreters who are Deaf) have additional tools and strategies to match the modality of the individual's unique communication strategies.