



## Getting Started: Deaf Culture

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

- **Term “Deaf”** holds great **cultural pride**
  - Terms deaf and dumb, deaf-mute, hearing impaired can be considered pejorative or have negative associations.
- **Deaf culture** maintains many traditions such as folklore, poetry, and athletics as well as clubs and reunions.
- D/deaf: **capitalized “D”** recognizes the individual identifies with Deaf culture and the community
  - Proud of their deafness and culture
  - Reject the idea of deafness as a disability
  - Do not necessarily “want to be hearing”
- 93.7% of all **deaf children** are born to hearing parents
  - Many hearing parents grieve the news that their child will not be “normal”
  - Deaf parents celebrate the news that their child will share their culture and language
- 35% of hearing parents report ability to sign, though only 10% achieve more than command-response mastery (no, stop, go, sit, come, etc.).
- Children with sign fluent parents usually have superior language skills in both ASL and English.
- **Level of family communication** can impact language and social development.
  - Hearing individuals access incidental learning, picking up information going on in the background. Deaf individuals must actively learn information.
  - In deaf environments there is a presumption of diversity in exposure to information.



## Deaf Space:

- Ensuring proper lighting.
  - Seating that allows for all participants to see each other.
  - Ensuring proper sightlines by removing any tall objects on the desk.
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- **Attention-getting strategies** include stomping on the floor or hitting a table, flickering the lights, tapping the person on the shoulder, or shouting.
  - **Emphasis on inclusion in communication:** turn-taking, eye contact, listener feedback
    - Deaf individuals will have sustained eye contact (5 seconds or more).
    - Lack of eye contact can be seen as evasive, hostile, or demonstrate a lack of attention to the conversation.
  - **Deaf community** is quite small and connected: quite possibly 1-3 degrees of separation between members.
  - The Deaf community faces oppression, discrimination, abandonment, and neglect on a daily basis.
    - Which can lead to the development of coping skills both healthy and unhealthy.
  - **Deaf individuals can:** drive, have sex, have children, have a family, rent/own their own home, obtain an executive level career, tell jokes – hearing ability is not required for any of these activities.
  - **Friends** can be more important than family – because of the language barriers that can exist.