

Communicating effectively with people who are deaf or hard of hearing



Ask questions

Ask the individual with the disability for his or her preferred way to communicate (email, instant messaging, through an interpreter, etc.). Ask what you can do to include the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing in groups, impromptu meetings, conversations, etc.

Remember these tips

With people who read lips, it's best to face the person directly and speak in a natural way. Do not exaggerate lip movements. Keep your hands away from your mouth.

If an interpreter is present, keep eye contact with and directly address the individual with the disability, not the interpreter. Avoid using sentences like: "Tell him I said..." The interpreter may be a few words behind in the conversation, so leave time to catch up.

If the person with a disability is not looking at you and you want to get his or her attention, you may want to gently tap the person's shoulder.

Be proactive

If possible, provide the information being presented at a meeting ahead of time so the individual can become familiar with it in advance.

Schedule meetings in advance so an interpreter can be arranged. Conducting impromptu meetings on Sametime is better than conference calling through speakerphone. Without advance notice, the individual may need to use a relay operator, which can slow down the call.

Set up different channels of communication. Use email, instant messaging and text messaging when possible. Even if voicemail is transcribed, accuracy is imperfect, so written communications are preferable.

Confirm understanding

Check with the person with the disability to confirm that he or she understands correctly. Alternatively, ask the person to summarize the content in writing or send an email listing the action items. Emails minimize embarrassment and the possibility of miscommunication. If there is a communication issue, use different words or gestures, or write the message.

Set expectations

Set clear expectations in writing whenever possible.

Tell the individual with disabilities if communication or performance expectations are not met.

If there is difficulty communicating, inform the person immediately and address it together.

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