

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Tips to:

Improve Officer Communications with Deaf & Hard of Hearing individuals in your Community

The Risk of Misinterpreting Culturally Typical Behavior

Know that Deaf people may get your attention in what may seem to be an unexpected manner by:

- Approaching you, even from behind
- Reaching out to touch or tap you, even from behind
- Using Sound Articulation - yelling or making noises
- Creating sound or alerting - smacking a table, stomping a foot on the floor or flicking lights
- Waving or gesturing with hands

Individuals may use facial expressions in place of voice inflection. Think of someone scolding their child without words. If you are not used to these expressions they may seem intense, intimidating or aggressive.

A person who does not respond to your request may not be hearing your command.

Simple Ways to Help Improve Everyday Communication

- Speak directly to the person you are communicating with (not an interpreter) and make eye contact
- Make sure the area and your face is visible and well lit, but avoid a bright light behind you
- Avoid a flashlight in the eyes, it makes it hard to read lips
- Don't yell or over exaggerate your speech
- Minimize distracting lights, sounds and activity
- Minimize the number of people communicating with the person
- Look for ways to communicate - text, writing, gesture, pointing, etc.

Other Considerations

- Avoid using family as interpreters
- If an arrest is necessary handcuff in front of the body if possible
- Ask the person about their communication preference

MCDHH
Massachusetts Commission
For The Deaf And Hard Of Hearing

ADA - Effective Communication

The ADA requires that law enforcement officers provide effective communication. What that looks like depends on the nature of the communication and the need and request of the individual. The ADA states that primary consideration be given to the expressed choice of the individual, who is in the best position to know their needs. Here is a chart that may help you work with an individual to find the most effective way to communicate.

MORE LIKELY

LESS LIKELY



	INTERPRETER	READ LIPS*	GESTURE	VRI	WRITE/ TEXT	CART	TRANSCRIP-TION APP	ASSISTIVE LISTENING
DEAF/ASL	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY
DEAF/English	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY
HARD OF HEARING	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY
LATE DEAFENED	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY	MORE LIKELY

*** Reading lips can be difficult in the best of settings. Minimize distracting lights, sounds and activity. Ensure enough light for good visibility.**

Individuals In Your Community.

A study at John Hopkins found that 1 in 5 people experiences hearing loss significant enough to impact communication. That is 20% and that is a lot of people in your community! Know that each has experienced their hearing loss differently. Some have been born deaf, some have lost hearing after acquiring language, some have slowly lost hearing as they have aged and some may have no idea it has impacted their ability to communicate. Why does this matter? Each individual will communicate differently based on their unique situation. Communication with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals is not a one size fits all situation. Know the communication tools available to you. Consult the above chart. Ask the person.

Request a Certified Legal Interpreter 24/7

Make an emergency request for a certified legal interpreter at 1-800-249-9949.

For Questions, additional information, or training:

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MAR 2023