

Deaf Community FAQ & Inclusive Tips for the Deaf Community

Deaf Facts:

Estimates from the SIPP (Survey of Income and Program Participation) indicate that fewer than 1 in 20 Americans are currently deaf or hard of hearing. In round numbers, nearly **10,000,000 persons are hard of hearing** and close to **1,000,000 are functionally deaf**. More than half of all persons with hearing loss or deafness are 65 years or older and less than 4% are under 18 years of age. Overall in the United States, 3.5% of people are deaf or hard of hearing.

Rochester, NY, “with some certainty,” has the **largest** deaf and hard-of-hearing per capita population among those ages 18 to 64.

Other 4 “big” cities are: DC, Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; and Los Angeles, CA.

There are an estimated **19,438** deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals **under the age of 65** in the greater Rochester area. For comparisons with other areas of the country, only those under the age of 65 were counted. Since it’s not uncommon for older people to lose their hearing, communities with a higher proportion of elderly residents would see higher percentages of individuals with hearing loss.

As a result, there are another estimated **23,236** deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals **over the age of 65** in the Rochester area, which increases Rochester’s per capita deaf and hard-of-hearing population to **3.7%** of the estimated area population of about 1.1 million people.

SOURCE: *Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT/NTID)*

What do the words mean?

Using *Person Centered Language*: **Deaf, Hard of Hearing, hearing loss**. NEVER Hearing impaired, the reason is because this term implies a deficit or that something is wrong that makes a person less than whole.

- ★ The term "**hard of hearing**" is often used to describe people with any degree of hearing loss, from mild to profound, including those who are deaf and those who are hard of hearing. Many individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing prefer the terms "deaf" and "hard of hearing," because they consider them to be more positive than the term "hearing impaired," which implies a deficit or that something is wrong that makes a person less than whole.
- ★ "**Deaf**" usually refers to a hearing loss so severe that there is very little or no functional hearing. "Hard of hearing" refers to a hearing loss where there may be enough residual hearing that an auditory device, such as a hearing aid or FM system, provides adequate assistance to process speech. Sometimes it is used to refer to people who are severely hard of hearing too
- ★ "**Deafened**" usually refers to a person who becomes deaf as an adult and, therefore, faces different challenges than those of a person who became deaf at birth or as a child.
- ★ Deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing individuals *may* choose to use hearing aids, cochlear implants, and/or other assistive listening devices to boost available hearing. Alternatively, or in addition, they may read lips, use sign language, sign language interpreters, and/or captioning.
- ★ People who are deaf or hard of hearing *may* have speech that is difficult to understand due to the inability to hear their own voice.

Why use capital D for Deaf OR lowercase d for deaf?

- ★ We use Deaf with a capital D to refer to people who have been deaf all their lives, or since before they started to learn to talk. They are prelingually (deaf from birth or from a time in infancy before the development of the ability to speak) deaf. It is an important distinction, because Deaf people tend to communicate in sign language as their first language. For most Deaf people English is a second language, and understanding complicated messages in English can be a problem.
- ★ Lowercase d is for people who are late deafened (became deaf later in life) and are not culturally deaf and sometimes don't sign. But some will learn sign later in life.

Know:

- ★ American Sign Language (ASL) is a *visual* language. With signing, the brain processes linguistic information through the eyes. ... Sign language is **not** a universal language — each country has **its own sign language**, and regions have dialects, much like the many languages spoken all over the world.
- ★ Like any spoken language, ASL is a language with its own unique rules of grammar and syntax. Like all languages, ASL is a living language that grows and changes over time. For example:
 - English: Where is the bathroom?
 - ASL: BATHROOM WHERE?
- ★ Grammar in English is written but grammar in ASL is IN the body language and facial expressions.
- ★ Hearing people have their English slang. There are also Deaf ASL slangs we use as well!

- ★ Signing and speaking English at the same time is called Simultaneous Communication (or SimCom), this is NOT a language. It's possible but not recommended.

Deaf Community Etiquette

Do:

- ALWAYS think about captions when showing any kind of video.
- When you see a Deaf person you work with or even passing by them to say hi (especially while wearing a mask), wave nicely or learn how to sign: HOW YOU?
- Speak clearly and **ENUNCIATE**. Oftentimes sounds don't come through as "clearly" and we would have to make assumptions and fill in the gaps to make the full sentence. So it takes longer for us to process what's being said.
- Face us when speaking (we do not mind the frequent eye contact). The reason for this is when you are facing a HOH person, the sound goes directly to them. So when you are facing away, they can't hear you nor read lips. Also there are some that do not rely on lip reading and some that do and some that can't. Don't assume they can lipread.
- Even though some of us can speak, it is always good to use SIGN or gestures in the best way you can. The result of growing up surrounded by hearing people, most of us find that we would much rather sign than speak. Showing an interest in learning the language is a huge gesture!
- If there is no room and you see two Deaf people talking standing up, feel free to walk between us instead of crouching down and saying "sorry."

Don't:

- Assume we can read lips. Not everyone can do that.
- Make us feel stupid by speaking really slowwwwwww.
- Exaggerated mouth movements can be seen as rude. There are only a limited number of mouth movements that are used while signing. Much-more-than-necessary mouthing can be seen as making fun of the Deaf (and you don't want that!)
- SHOUT. We cannot hear you, so it doesn't help to shout...