

Etiquette for Co-Workers of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Employees

1. Be patient.
2. When meeting a Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (HOH) person for the first time, it is natural to feel “nervous” and reserved. Try to relax and use whatever means available to communicate. Remember, they are people first.
3. Get the Deaf/HoH person’s attention before speaking, and DO NOT turn your back while talking to the Deaf/HoH individual.
4. Lip-reading is an acquired skill. Do not expect the Deaf/HoH person to lip-read a conversation with complete accuracy. Lip-reading is 80% guesswork and the amount any one person can receive using this skill will depend on the individual’s level of competency.
5. Do not shout at a Deaf/HoH person. Speaking louder doesn’t help and it exaggerates the lip movements making lip-reading more difficult.
6. Include the Deaf/HoH as much as possible in the workplace. Telling a Deaf/HoH person “never mind” or “I’ll tell you later” alienates them and gives the impression that they are unimportant members of the staff.
7. Upon entering the area of your deaf co-worker and realize they are on a videophone or TTY call, DO NOT read the message on the visual display or watch the conversation. This is eavesdropping. Also do not interrupt their call... be as courteous as you would be to a hearing co-worker.
8. There are a variety of ways to get the attention of a Deaf/HoH co-worker. Some examples are: a light tap on the shoulder or arm, a wave within their visual range, physically move within visual range, or tapping on the desk.
9. Remember that the use of speech is a choice to Deaf/HoH individuals. Respect their decision and remember... speaking is not related to one’s intelligence.
10. Ask the Deaf/HoH person the best way to interact.
11. Remember that facial expressions and body language tell a great deal. Make sure your “visual” messages match your spoken/signed one. Also, eye contact is valued in Deaf communication. It shows interest and conveys the feeling of the conversation.
12. Have paper and pencil available whenever possible.
13. Be courteous to the person during the conversation. If you are interrupted by the phone or another individual, explain the temporary interruption, but do not have a conversation with another hearing person while the Deaf/HoH person waits.

14. DO NOT place anything over your mouth when speaking.
15. Speak directly to the Deaf/HoH person. When using the services of a Sign Language Interpreter, avoid using phrases such as “Tell him./Tell her...” Speak naturally as though the interpreter was not there.
16. Use of gestures, facial expression, and body language enhance the communication are natural to the Deaf/HoH person. Using these will reinforce the message.
17. Since conversation is a two-way street, receiving messages is as important as sending them. DO NOT hesitate to ask a Deaf/HoH person to slow down or to repeat when you do not fully understand. It is embarrassing to the sender as well as the receiver.