

Tips for Communicating with Employees who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

One-to-One Communication Strategies

Ask your deaf or hard-of-hearing employee how he or she prefers to communicate.

Get the employee's attention before speaking.
Call his or her name – or a tap on the shoulder, a wave, or other visual signal will get the employee's attention.

Look directly at the employee when communicating.
Avoid looking down at papers, looking at a computer screen, or writing on a board. A deaf or hard-of-hearing employee benefits from facial cues.

Facilitate speechreading.
State the topic of discussion and speak clearly.

Make eye contact.
Eye contact makes communication direct. Even if an interpreter is present, talk directly to the deaf or hard-of-hearing employee.

Non-verbal ways to help communication.
Use gestures, body language and facial expression to help communication.

Choose an environment that is conducive to communication.
Use a quiet place with minimal interruptions.

Tips for working with an interpreter.
When using an interpreter, make eye contact with, look at, and speak directly to the deaf person. Ask the deaf employee where is the best place for the interpreter to sit.

Take advantage of current technology.
Use email, instant messaging, texting, and apps on your computer or smart phone. These are easy and inexpensive to use.

Use hands-on demonstration for training and assignment of tasks.
Hands-on demonstrations and showing examples can clarify instructions.

Group Situations and Meeting Communication Strategies

Ask the employee to choose the best seating for his or her communication needs.
The employee may need to sit next to or across from the speaker so he or she can see the speaker's face. Consider the layout of the room to provide good communication.

Make sure only one person talks at a time.
Indicate to the employee which person is speaking.

Provide an agenda and use visual aids.
Vision is the primary method for receiving information for a deaf or hard-of-hearing employee. PowerPoint® presentations and captioned video programs are useful. Allow time to read the visual information before speaking.

Work with a sign language interpreter.
Ask the employee where he or she would prefer to have the interpreter stand or sit.

Assign a notetaker.
It's also a good idea to assign a notetaker to record and distribute the information discussed. Have minutes or notes taken during the meeting for future reference.

Take advantage of current technology.
Use email, instant messaging, texting, and apps on your computer or smart phone, videophone, and online relay services. For small group situations, apps like ASR (Automatic Speech Recognition), group chat, or video communication can be used.

Use technology for remote conferencing.
Video conferencing software is available and enables the deaf or hard-of-hearing employee to fully participate in meetings.

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