

Definitions of Deafness

When we use the term **deaf**, we mean it to include people on the full spectrum of deafness: Deaf Sign Language users, deafblind, deafened and hard of hearing people.

If you are meeting with a deaf person for the first time, it is important to ask the person what their language and communication support needs are so that you can arrange to have appropriate professional registered communication support booked for the meeting/appointment.

What do these terms mean?

Deaf Sign Language users

These are people whose preferred language or only language is British Sign Language (BSL). These people have been born deaf or have become deaf early in life. People with this level of deafness are described as being profoundly deaf.

Deaf BSL users usually see themselves as part of a linguistic/cultural minority known as the Deaf Community.

A hearing professional who is not proficient in BSL (equivalent of BSL Level 3) must book a BSL/English Interpreter for all meetings and appointments with a Deaf Sign Language user in order to communicate effectively with the person.

People who are Deafblind

Deafblindness is sometimes called dual sensory impairment. This is because deafblind people will have both some hearing loss and some sight loss. A person can be born deafblind (called congenital deafblindness) or lose both their hearing and sight in later life. Some people who are born with deafblindness may also have physical and/or learning disabilities. A person who is born deaf who later loses their sight is most likely to be a BSL user. Other deafblind people may be born blind and lose their hearing in later life. These people will use a spoken language and may also use braille for written documents. It is important to remember that many deafblind people may not be totally deaf and totally blind.

Professionals should always find out exactly what form of language and/or communication support the person needs. It could be the person needs a Guide/Communicator or has to have written information in braille. The person may have more complex support needs that will need to be addressed.

People who are Deafened

People who were born hearing and become severely deaf after learning to speak are often described as deafened or as having an acquired profound hearing loss (APHL). This hearing loss may be due to a disease or illness or there may not be an identified reason for the loss of the person's hearing. Deafened people may rely on lipreading to follow a conversation or need to have things written down for them.

If arranging a meeting or appointment with a person who is deafened, then it is important to find out what support they need, for example, an Electronic Notetaker or a Lip Speaker.

People who are Hard of Hearing

Hard of Hearing is a term used to describe people with a mild to moderate hearing loss. People who are hard of hearing will, in general, lose their hearing gradually and the majority of hard of hearing people do so later in their lives. A person with a mild hearing loss might wear a hearing aid and have some difficulty in following conversations in noisy situations. A person with a moderate hearing loss might have one or two hearing aids and will have difficulty following normal speech without the aid.

If the person coming to a meeting or appointment uses a hearing aid, then a loop system will enable them to take part.

