

- **Sign language or gesture:** some, though not all, deaf and hard of hearing people use sign language. Without compromising your personal safety, don't assume that somebody who doesn't speak and who seems to be waving their hands and arms is being threatening or violent. They may simply be trying to communicate.
- **Not reacting to speech:** a hard of hearing person may not react to speech, ask you to speak louder or repeat what you said (several times). If they give an inappropriate answer, they may have misheard or misunderstood your question.
- **Written messages:** deaf people sometimes communicate with hearing people by writing messages. Be patient and allow them to do this – English may not be their first language.
- **Hearing aid(s):** some deaf and hard of hearing people wear hearing aids. **Don't assume** that they enable the person to hear normally – they don't 'correct' deafness in the way that glasses 'correct' eyesight. They may be worn to filter out certain sounds, amplify others, or help the deaf person's own speech.
- **Hearing dog:** some deaf people have 'hearing dogs', just as some blind people have guide dogs. Hearing dogs are usually identified by a clearly marked lead or strap.
- **Studying your face:** a deaf or hard of hearing person may look into your face more intently than a hearing person when you speak. This is because they may be lipreading you or trying to understand your meaning by studying your expression.
- **Bumping into people or objects:** this could indicate that the person is blind as well as deaf (deafblind).

Guidance to Police

Communicating with Deaf People



Criminal Justice System: working together for the public

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How common is deafness and hearing loss?

Very common. There are **nine million deaf or hard of hearing people in the UK** – that's one person in every seven. So it's likely that you will encounter a deaf person in your work.

How do I communicate with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing?

- Find a suitable place to talk, with **good lighting**, away from noise and distractions.
- Make sure you have the person's **attention** before you start speaking.
- **Speak clearly**, not too slowly, and use normal lip movements. Use natural facial expressions and gestures.
- **Don't raise your voice – keep it at a normal level.** It's uncomfortable for a hearing aid user if you shout and it looks aggressive.
- Try to ensure that a deaf person can **see your face** while you're speaking to them.
- Even if someone is wearing a hearing aid, always ask if they need to **lipread** you.
- Check that the person you're talking to can **follow what you're saying.**
- If someone doesn't understand what you've said, try saying it in a **different way.**
- Use **plain language, no jargon or abbreviations.**
- Use **written notes** – but **only** if the person has agreed to communicate this way.
- If you're communicating through a sign language interpreter, it's respectful always to **speak directly to the deaf person**, not to the interpreter.

What if I need to handcuff a deaf person?

If arresting a deaf person, consider the need for, and effect of, handcuffing. Some deaf people use sign language and would be unable to communicate while handcuffed. Although the original decision to handcuff may be perfectly appropriate and justifiable, you should assess whether there is a continuing need for it.

What if I need to interview a deaf person?

To interview a deaf or deafblind suspect or witness, you may need to book a **language service professional (LSP)**. The type of LSP you will need depends on the deaf person's needs and the circumstances of the interview. The information below is a quick guide only – you should seek further advice when making the booking.

- **British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreters:** suitable for deaf people whose first or preferred language is BSL.
- **Video interpreting:** suitable for brief appointments or if an interpreter is unavailable.
- **Deafblind interpreters and communicator guides:** suitable for deafblind people.
- **Lipspeakers:** suitable for those who prefer to communicate through lipreading and speech.
- **Electronic notetakers, manual notetakers, speech-to-text reporters:** suitable for deaf people who are comfortable reading English – often at high speed and up to a couple of hours at a time (in the case of speech-to-text reporters).

You can find further details on the different types of LSPs in Annex D of the **National Agreement on the arrangements for the use of interpreters in criminal proceedings**, available at: <http://frontline.cjsonline.gov.uk/guidance/race-confidence-and-justice/>.

If a deaf person is due to appear in court, they will also need an LSP at that stage of the proceedings and it might be your responsibility to book the interpreter for that purpose too.

How can I contact an LSP?

You should always obtain a qualified LSP from the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP). You can find the CACDP online directory on their website, www.cacdp.org.uk, under 'Interpreters/LSPs', then 'Online Directory'.

How do I identify if someone is deaf or hard of hearing?

Deafness is sometimes called 'the hidden disability' because it has no obvious signs. Nevertheless, there are ways to identify if someone is deaf:

- **'I am deaf':** some people will tell you directly that they are deaf, or mouth the words. They may also gesture to their ears or hearing aids.
- **Speech:** the person may speak in a way that you find unclear or unusual. Their speech may be quieter, slower, louder, or lack intonation. Be aware that you may mistakenly think the person is drunk. Remember that, although their speech may seem unusual to you, it will be their natural way of speaking.