



## **Interacting With Deaf/Hard-of-hearing Customers and Clients**

- Maintain eye contact. This is incredibly important. Breaking eye contact without warning, especially to carry on a spoken conversation with someone else, is rude to the deaf person.
- Make sure the deaf person is looking at you before you speak, sign, or gesture. If you need to get his or her attention, tap him or her on the shoulder or make a small waving movement in his or her peripheral vision.
- Don't assume that every deaf person speechreads. Speechreading is a very difficult skill to master (even for hearing people), and many deaf people don't find it effective beyond common phrases such as "How are you?"
- Also don't assume that every deaf person signs. While many do, there are a wide variety of communication methods employed by deaf people.
- Keep your face and lips visible. Even if someone does not speechread well, a great deal of information is conveyed by the face. Make sure your face is sending the message you want it to.
- Speak naturally. Don't exaggerate your mouth movements or speak too slowly. And don't shout!
- Avoid standing with your back to a window or other light source – this makes speechreading and getting information from facial expressions difficult.
- Offer a pen and paper to write notes back and forth, but be aware that English is a second language for most deaf people. When writing notes:
  - Keep it simple! Use short sentences and plain language.
  - Don't use idioms and slang.
  - Repeat the question to make sure you understand.
- Look directly at the deaf person when speaking, even when communicating through an interpreter.
- ATTITUDE is the most important thing! Keep in mind that most deaf people spend every day of their lives trying to communicate with hearing people, and so have many strategies for communicating with someone who doesn't know their language. Follow their lead in a respectful, patient way. Deaf people will appreciate your efforts to communicate.

**For more information visit [www.modeldeafcommunity.org](http://www.modeldeafcommunity.org)**