

Deaf & Hard of Hearing

First Responder Training Video Series—Information Sheet

Provided by the County
of San Diego Office of
Emergency Services

This document provides a brief summary of the information presented in the first responder training video relating to those members of our community who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Understanding individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- An individual who is deaf is profoundly unable to hear. Typically they use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate.
- An individual who is hard of hearing generally has some degree of hearing and may use hearing aids or other assistive devices. They may use ASL, however, they may also use speech and listening methods.
- Common misunderstandings associated with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing include assuming that all deaf individuals are able to lip read effectively, that yelling or speaking directly into the person's ear will help them hear better, and that all individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing use ASL to communicate.

Visual cues to look for:

- When speaking to an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, you may notice a lack of response.
- Look for hearing aids, cochlear implants, or other assistive devices they may use.
- Communication methods an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing may use:
 - Visual methods: May use facial expressions, body language, hand gestures, text messaging, or direct you to write on paper.
 - Tactile methods: May tap you on the shoulder, stomp on the ground, or bang on a surface. These methods are generally used to get your attention and are not acts of aggression.
- Some individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may feel comfortable speaking and using their voice. They may scream or yell if they are at serious risk of injury.

Best practices for communicating with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing:

- Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may be more responsive to visual stimulus.
- Ask the individual, via writing, what the best way to communicate with them may be.
- Be sure to be clear while communicating. When communicating verbally, face the individual directly and make sure your face is unobstructed. When communicating in writing, be sure to use language that is understandable at various reading levels. Be aware that misunderstandings can easily occur when trying to communicate verbally or in writing. If the individual uses ASL, a sign language interpreter may be the most effective means of communication. If an ASL interpreter is requested, accommodate that request as soon as possible.
- When using an ASL interpreter, speak directly to the deaf individual, not the interpreter.

Special thanks to the following organizations for participating in this video:

Deaf Community Services of San Diego
CLIP Interpreting
Heartland Fire & Rescue
San Diego Police Department

