



# ***DEAFBLIND INTERPRETING***



The purpose of this brochure is to shine a light on the adjustments needed to be made when interpreting for a Deafblind person. Signed languages are of course visual languages but without the use of vision extra information needs to be relayed if we are to achieve equal access to information.

Environmental information is interpreted.  
Facial expressions and reactions are also interpreted.

## ***How to make first contact***

Try to approach from the front if possible to give the Deafblind person a chance to use their sight.

A small, slow wave in the front of the face will let you know if vision is used.

If there is no response then a soft touch with the back of your hand on the back of the Deafblind person's hand or arm will gain their attention.

After making first contact the Deafblind person will hold one OR two hands up signifying which mode of communication is required.

## ***Visual frame***

Visual frame is used usually because vision is restricted to a small area. This may be due to a central vision loss or a peripheral vision loss.

If visual frame is used then the distance from the receiver may need adjusting.

Signing must be kept within a smaller frame so that the hands do not disappear from sight. Signing is best understood when slowed down and kept to a smooth, relaxed pace.

## ***Tactile***

Tactile signing is used when there is little to no vision left to be able to see handshape or movement

With the hands of the Deafblind person placed on the hands of the interpreter Auslan is used.

## ***Numbers***

Numbers can be difficult to catch through tactile means; following are some hints to help achieve a more successful interaction

Preempt the number with the sign for NUMBER or other signs i.e. HOW^MANY, HOW^MUCH.

Another method is to drop the interpreter's hands to a lower position so that your fingers rest in the palm of the Deafblind person allowing the receiver of the message to feel the fingers.

Another method is to separate the digits in the number.

70 becomes a 7 and an 0.

143 becomes 1, 4, 3.

or use Print on Palm (P.O.P.) for numbers and simply draw on the hand of the person.

With single digits above five make sure that your thumb is felt by the fingers of the Deafblind person.

## ***Adjusted signs***

Some Auslan signs are inappropriate to use in the tactile mode. Usually it is because these signs are produced below the waist.

In these cases the words are either spelt or a substitute sign is used. Notice that the locations of production of these signs are below the waist.

Some people have a tendency to hold and control the receiver for fear of losing contact. For example, LAZY and DOG.

## ***How to direct the client's gaze***

Redirecting a client's gaze can be tricky because the hands can be lost from sight

## ***Examples of signs that need to be clarified***

"GOOD LUCK" – "DELICIOUS"

"THINK" – "SEE"

"BEAUTIFUL" – "CHRISTIAN"

"RED" – "LIGHT"

The location of these signs can be confused. So to clarify after the sign is produced the first time they are often spelt. Another method is to add a relative word to help differentiate between the two signs, for example signing

"COLOUR RED" or "FOOD DELICIOUS"

## ***Deafblind fingerspelling***

Deafblind fingerspelling can be used when a person does not know sign language or for some reason cannot learn a second language.

Find a comfortable position for you both.

Try to sit so that the receiving hand of the deafblind person is in place of your passive hand. This will feel more natural and therefore easier to spell.

## ***Tracking***

Tracking; the Deafblind person holds one or two wrists of the interpreter to help guide their eyes to where the signing is. This is because often fast movement is missed and the hands of the signer are lost.

## ***Close Range***

Close range is used for those who have vision but need signs to be produced at quite a close proximity.

## ***Other considerations***

- Ask the Deafblind person if they would like to know about aside conversations,
- All modes require relaxed, clear signing kept at a constant pace.
- Lighting is an issue for many Deafblind people, glare from a window, reflections off a table top, the location of overhead lighting and the colour of background surfaces need to be considered. A black backdrop will optimize contrast.
- Keeping signs small within the person's visual frame. Work out the distance so the Deafblind person can focus

## ***Acknowledgment and feedback***

You will see on the DVD that while a Deafblind person is signing the receiver of the message will tap or knock on the arm or leg of the signer. This is very important but often forgotten about. It is a way of letting the signer know that the conversation is being followed. (Similar to how we nod our head or say yep yep when someone is speaking to us). This simple Social Haptic symbol can be adjusted to show interest, boredom, shock or excitement. The same can be done for a negation on the arm or leg.

## ***Summary***

Please keep in mind that you are using a visual language with a person who has limited or no vision. This means that any signs that have non-manual features bound to the sign need to be clarified. Emotions are often missed so they too need to be interpreted through touch. Contact is of utmost importance for feedback purposes.

While signing to a Deafblind person try to keep watching the facial expressions of the Deafblind person. This will give you an idea of where specifically in the conversation a break down may have happened. Then for clarity and repairing you can start with the sign that caused confusion.

It is important for the signer to remain relaxed so that the receiver of the message can feel.

If you are conversing with full tactile it is important not to restrict your signing to a smaller space. The flavor and richness of this language is found in the expression of a sign so if you try to restrict the movement, meaning can be lost. Keep your signing smooth, at a constant pace so there is not a lot of speed variation in the production of signs.

When fingerspelling, try to open your hands and enunciate, crooked fingers are again hard to understand and comes across as mumblings.

After making contact and before any information is interpreted it is important to tell the Deafblind person who you are.

When interpreting for a meeting with multiple participants it is important to interpret the name of the person who is speaking. Every time there is a new speaker the name of that speaker must be interpreted.

Any environmental information is interpreted to keep the Deafblind person involved in their surroundings.

During any down time extra information can be relayed for example what a person looks like, what they are wearing or a person's general mood.

Never walk away from a Deafblind person without informing them where you are going.

During any gaps in a conversation try to keep the Deafblind person informed about what is happening by simply telling them that someone is reading some papers or that the microphone has stopped working.

In a meeting where there are multiple speakers involved, asking a question of the Deafblind person can be difficult. One way around any difficulty is to sign "QUESTION (Deafblind person's name)" or "ASK (Deafblind person's name)". Then using the sign "WELCOME" to indicate the appropriate time to answer the question.

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