

FESS UP. WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU COULD DO OVER?

Part of being human is the inevitability of making mistakes throughout our lives. Another part of being human is pretending that we never make them. Many of us especially do not like to acknowledge on-the-job mistakes. We do not want to appear incompetent to our coworkers and employers; and, it is easier to assign responsibility for any problems to the other person when we think we are right.

Among the things Americans have reported fearing most in their lives is embarrassment. When we try to think about what else we could do as hearing people to respond more helpfully and skillfully to Deaf, it might be healthy to acknowledge some of our past embarrassments (in preparation for future ones). It might be helpful to consider what you imagine might cause you to feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, or unprepared in the future. Self-reflection and humility can be a foundation for learning what else we can do to improve these interactions. It can be instructive to remember and describe your "I wish I could do it over again" experiences with Deaf.

Talk about this: *When meeting a Deaf person, what did you first notice about her/him? What thoughts came into your mind? How did you feel, what physical sensations did you notice? What did you do?*

This process of asking and answering questions is not about being the smartest, most accomplished person in the discussion. It is about being honest, feeling embarrassed, having a sense of humor about the things we have done in the name of "good intentions", and acknowledging that we can do better.

WHAT WOULD A GOOD HOST DO?

Imagine this. You are on your own in a place where people do not speak your language. By appearances, there are mostly similarities. You see them smiling at each other. The difference is that when you talk, people look confused. Some of them look annoyed or afraid. You wonder if they are angry. Some look away or even walk away. Some ignore you. Others lean forward and widen their eyes like you are a child.

You think of yourself as savvy and smart, an able communicator. Naturally, you feel more confident about some things than others. Here, among these people, no one is responding in a familiar or helpful way. No one is responding to your questions or requests in ways that make sense. You were told that this place and these people could offer advice and assistance to anyone who needed it. You saw a contact phone number on their brochure that made you think they could be helpful specifically to you. Now, you wonder if any of that is true.

Talk about this: *How would it affect you if people did not respond to you in ways that made sense? What if this was not the first time this happened to you? What if this kind of behavior by others was all too familiar*

rather than a singular unsatisfying experience? How would these reactions influence your expectations and your behavior?

Think about being a host. Consideration of what good hosts do can serve you well in a large number of situations - especially situations in which your encounters are to provide information, support, services, advocacy, or to provide a safe place.

Talk about this: *What do good hosts hope to accomplish?
Make a list of things good hosts do and talk about why they do them.*

The bottom line for good hosts is to make others feel comfortable. Comfort might be defined differently on different occasions and for different people. Children need different experiences than adults. People who read with ease have different needs than those who do not. People who are Deaf have to be noticed and acknowledged differently than those who hear and use English as their primary language.

Respect and safety are of primary importance when people have specific fears and concerns (e.g., violence or other abuse). Add to that the thoughts and emotions of anticipating that making yourself understood will be a significant problem. For too many Deaf, there are personal or reported histories of hearing people not even trying to respond to them. These are valid reasons not to enter a situation with confidence and trust.

**GOOD IDEAS ARE MOST VALUABLE WHEN THEY
ARE APPLIED AS THOUGHTFUL ACTIONS**

Respect, autonomy, safety, and self-direction - these are concepts of support that many of us talk about and many of our organizations promise, but they are really quite abstract. We have to wonder each time we encounter someone new, *what would help this person feel comfortable? What might help her feel safe? What might help her feel respected and in charge?*

It is not enough to say *we listen, we respect, we support*. Good ideas are most valuable when they are applied as thoughtful actions and when we notice the effects those actions have. If we pay close attention, the other person lets us know whether we were helpful or not, whether we were respectful or not, and whether we contributed to creating a safe setting or not.

Talk about this: *When you meet someone, what do you do to help that person feel respected and safe? How do you assess whether your actions are being experienced as respectful and helpful?*

Note: If you don't know the answer to this or any of the questions asked in the workbook, it is reasonable to acknowledge that. *I don't know* can be a valuable starting point.

Your intention to be helpful does not mean a person will have the experience of feeling helped. Good intention does not automatically equal a helpful experience. What this means is that what results in one person feeling safe and respected might not be the same for the next person. We can select people who are easy to bond with in our personal lives. People often say of close friends, *we understand each other. She understands me. He gets my sense of humor.* In our families and in our work lives, we do not choose. We often have to make extra efforts to understand what an individual needs to feel respected and safe.

EXPECTATIONS AND STEREOTYPES - CHECKING OUR ASSUMPTIONS

We want people to operate within our expectations, in ways that we understand. We want people to present *themselves* within *our* comfort zones. When we encounter someone who seems to operate outside of our expectations, we generally do not challenge our own beliefs; we say *what's wrong* with that person. Or, we make that person an exception to our rules about *people like that*. This is one way that stereotypes are maintained and even strengthened. Assumptions about Deaf probably exist in the minds of a great many hearing people. Being honest about our assumptions is not easy for at least two reasons. First, it can be embarrassing. Second, we believe our assumptions are the truth.

Talk about this: *What assumptions have you made (or have you heard others make) about Deaf? Talk about your assumptions related to Deaf in general and the following in particular:*

- *reading lips*
- *reading and writing English*
- *speech*
- *education and perceptions of intelligence*
- *use of ASL*

The ability to read and write English varies depending on learning opportunity. Hearing people who have had learning opportunities write using English grammar, syntax and punctuation. Spelling rules are based on sound and memory. Written English is an oral language made visual.

The average Deaf reader is estimated to be most comfortable at the 3rd or 4th grade level. This is not to be misunderstood as an indication of intelligence. Remember, this is reading and writing in a second language that is not even close to the primary language. (Can you do that?) Some Deaf will write and follow most of the rules of English. Another Deaf person might write a message more like: *me hurt baby alone help now you me.* The ranges of measured intelligence among Deaf are the same as the ranges of intelligence among hearing people.

THE GOOD HOST SOLUTION

The word host is a noun and a verb. A host is someone you are. More importantly, to host is something you do. When your goal is to be a good host, the title is less important than what you do and try to avoid doing. You have heard the phrase, "in name only." To be a host in name only suggests that you have the position, but are not making active and attentive choices about what you do. A good host is deliberately aware of each person as contact is made and throughout the time they spend together.

Talk about this: *What could you do to help a person who is Deaf feel respected and safe? What does a good host avoid doing and why?*

When you are the host, your primary mission is to make those who come to you feel comfortable. This is more challenging than it sounds because each person who shows up or contacts you is different. Each has different expectations of you and the time you will share together. Each has prior experience with hosts that might influence how they interact with you. Each has had a different kind of day before making contact with you.

ESTABLISHING AN INITIAL CONNECTION

THE BEST WAY TO MOVE FORWARD...IS ATTENTIVELY.

You have probably noticed throughout this workbook how many times statements have been qualified, e.g., *some, might, probably, many...* Part of being prepared is keeping in mind that Deaf are as varied as hearing people. Another part of being prepared is understanding that what is respectful is not the same across cultures. The best way to move forward with an interaction is attentively.

Too much speed and limited attention are among the enemies of a good host. We can become automatic about the way we do our jobs. The pace and expectations of the day can interfere with establishing a mutually satisfying connection. When we consider what is supposed to take place primarily from our own perspective, there is the risk of not noticing the other person in any significant way.

You will be better prepared if you are aware that the next person you meet might be Deaf. The Deaf you meet will try to let you know what method of communication is the most helpful to get started - if you are attentive enough to notice and humble enough to be guided. Chances are very good that the Deaf person you meet will have had more experience trying to communicate with hearing people than you have had trying to communicate with her/him.

Talk about this: *What could you do when you notice or suspect that someone is Deaf or hard of hearing?*

A Deaf person might approach a desk or be looking around if it is not visually clear where to go. Talking to someone who is Deaf when she is not looking at you will not result in communication. For example, if you ask, *may I help you*, and the person does not see you talking directly to her, a connection will not be made. If you ask a question while you are looking at something on your desk, or while looking at a computer screen, thinking the sound of the question is enough, you will not make a connection. Even if the Deaf person thinks maybe you are talking to her, her method of responding will probably not be oral. Being visually attentive throughout an interaction is essential.

When you suspect that someone is Deaf, or has not heard you, wait for eye contact or consider approaching the person to be sure that you are seen. Move within the person's visual field. Smile. Show a friendly face. When the person looks at you, if you raise your eyebrows in a natural easy way, it is the facial expression of availability and interest. It can serve as a back-up to *may I help you*. Asking a brief direct question to a person who is Deaf helps to establish a connection even if the person does not hear what you said. She knows you are inviting her to take a conversational turn.

**BEING VISUALLY ATTENTIVE
THROUGHOUT AN INTERACTION IS ESSENTIAL.**

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO KNOW EVERYTHING

Three different Deaf might indicate three different methods of communication. You, as a hearing person, do not have to know everything. That is important to remember. You do not have to be proficient in sign language (although it would be great if each of us was fluent in the languages of all the people we want to help). Accept the guidance a Deaf person wants to give you.

The Deaf person has an advantage in this situation. S/He knows s/he is Deaf and assumes that you can hear. S/He knows some of the ways that have been most successful in similar situations in the past. What is required of you is your visual attention and your patience. Resist inclinations to look around. Watch and listen for clues about what s/he is trying to let you know. Watch for all cues from the Deaf person including use of language in written form if it is initiated. Follow the leader.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

You might notice:

- a sign toward her ear to tell you that she is Deaf;

- a sign that looks like someone writing with a pen on the palm to indicate that he would like to communicate with you using paper and pencil;
- hands and arms moving, i.e., ASL, and
- from hard of hearing people you might hear talking with a nasal quality that might be higher in pitch than most conversational speech.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU RECOGNIZE SOMEONE IS DEAF

Notice when your own discomfort begins. This kind of discomfort causes people to do one of two things and both give the appearance that we are not about to be helpful. We either rush to do something without making a personal connection or try to get away as fast as possible. *What's that about?*

Remember the "good host" approach. A host who seems jittery does not instill comfort and safety. Nevertheless, that is how you might be feeling. It is useful to remember that your feelings are often conveyed in your actions. Someone who cannot hear you can see you. They can see you looking around for help. They can see you looking nervous. When Deaf approach you for information or assistance they do not want you to feel uncomfortable.

Before trying to impose a method of communication, be practical. Allow a cordial pause and watch what the person does. If you are feeling nervous, remember to exhale. In this situation, awkwardness just means, *I don't know what to do yet*. Being in a temporary state of *I don't know* is nothing to be ashamed of. Deaf have more experience trying to establish a connection with a hearing person than you might have trying to establish a connection with someone who is Deaf. Trust that she will offer clues about what might help. Rather than defining your role as "a good host" as having to be in charge and know everything, consider your role as flexible and open, as accommodating.

INTERPRETERS (also see Appendix A)

The interpreter is not for the Deaf person or for the hearing person. The interpreter is for both hearing and Deaf. The interpreter makes in-depth communication between hearing and Deaf possible. The interpreter is of mutual benefit.

An American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter is trained over many years to bridge English and ASL. The interpreter provides an English version of a signed message and signs the hearing person's spoken message. Because ASL and English are not literal word for word translations, it is possible that two interpreters might deliver a slightly different message. It is possible to use signs in the order of English. This is called

"signed exact English." However, because English is not the language of people who use ASL, it would not make sense.

Professional interpreters can be "nationally certified" or "state verified." Use of nationally certified interpreters is highly recommended. Current listings of interpreters can be found through the DHFS Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (www.dhfs.state.wi.us/sensory/). All professional interpreters have a code of ethics. Among their commitments is to maintain confidentiality.

Some interpreters become more familiar with some topics, which makes interpreting easier. Legal, medical, and other areas of information and advocacy are a few of them. Stated another way, not all interpreters are equally prepared for all kinds of interpreting.

Talk about this: *Why do you think a Deaf person might have strong feelings about selecting her own interpreter?*

There is another kind of interpreter, known as a Certified Deaf Interpreter. Not all Deaf have had the opportunity to learn ASL. An analogy among hearing people might be related to literacy. Not all hearing people have had the opportunity to learn to read. Literacy is not always an indication of intelligence as much as an indication of learning opportunity. It is also reasonable to say that hearing people who have not learned to read do not have access to all of the same information as readers. Deaf who do not learn ASL do not have access to all of the same information as Deaf who use ASL. Again, this is not an indication of intelligence as much as an indication of opportunity.

Some Deaf are not exposed to ASL or have not had the opportunity to refine language skills. Their language usage, including grammatical structure and vocabulary, might be less sophisticated than ASL users who have had more language instruction. Deaf who use some recognized ASL and some personally created signs might have difficulty understanding and being understood by Deaf who use ASL. Certified Deaf Interpreters are trained to interpret minimal language signing for an ASL interpreter who then conveys the message in spoken language.

Interpreters are not supposed to add or change the message they are interpreting. It is not their job to tell a hearing person whether the Deaf person understands what is being said. It remains the responsibility of the hearing person to verify whether the Deaf person understands the message. Checking to be sure that all of the parties understand one another is the responsibility of the people communicating with one another, rather than the interpreter.

FACE THE DEAF PERSON AND SPEAK NORMALLY.

An interpreter will most likely sit to your side. One reason is so that the Deaf person can see the interpreter and you with the shortest possible eye movement. In a group situation, the interpreter and the Deaf person will determine the best positions.

Your inclination might be to ask the interpreter to relay a message by saying, *tell her...*, *ask him...*, *is she...* When an interpreter is present, your conversation should always be directed to the Deaf person rather than through the interpreter. You face the Deaf person and speak normally, even though she or he might be looking mostly at the interpreter. You only need to speak loudly enough for the interpreter to hear you while you are facing the Deaf person.

WHAT MANY DEAF WOULD NOT APPRECIATE OR FIND HELPFUL

Remember not to be offended if you realize that your good intentions are not experienced as helpful.

All manner of sound cues, including indoor and outdoor buzzers, bells, intercoms, beepers, pagers, etc. are not helpful to Deaf. If you have a security system that requires a verbal response to a sound cue in order to get in, Deaf will not make it through.

ASL students should certainly use their emerging language skills in informal settings whenever someone who is Deaf wants to be engaged. However, you and others in your office who are enrolled in a beginning or even advanced ASL class are not interpreters. Professional situations require professional abilities with all the necessary responsibilities. Not the least of these responsibilities is an ethical commitment to confidentiality and the ability to interpret correctly.

It is not appreciated when hearing people call a coworker who has a Deaf sibling to interpret for you. Bridging language is not the only concern. Professional boundaries, matters of privacy, and ethics still need to be honored.

It should not be assumed that all Deaf read lips. Lip reading alone is not a preferred method of communication for many Deaf. For some, it might have limited benefits to establish a connection. However, avoid covering your mouth or turning away while talking. Finish whatever you were saying and watch for some acknowledgment before turning to look at anything or anyone else.

After you have recognized that someone is Deaf, do not hand out standard paperwork or organizational literature. Standard written English is not the language of most Deaf. If there are forms to be completed or informational papers to be reviewed, these can be reviewed with an interpreter.

The use of English double negatives often causes confusion for hearing people. They are at least as confusing and probably more so for Deaf.

Many of us smile and nod when we do not understand other people. We intend to be polite. We convince ourselves that we are doing this because we do not want to embarrass the other person or be the cause of discomfort. Ultimately, it is not an act of respect or kindness to pretend we understand. Avoid smiling and nodding when you do not have a clue.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The suggestions presented here were offered by Deaf who were specifically asked what they thought would be helpful and most often experienced as respectful.

▶ FOCUS ON THE PERSON.

"Focus on the person" could be said about each and every contact we have. Whatever factors might compete for your attention, when you are in a service job, especially in a helping role, focus on the person has to be the golden rule. When someone makes contact, give your attention to that person. **The trend toward multi-tasking only seems like a good idea.** Whether a person is making contact for information or direct and immediate assistance, **your undivided attention matters** to the person making contact. This person wants to trust you and this encounter might be your only chance to demonstrate that trusting you or your organization is wise. This is especially true for people who are Deaf and rely on what they see for information.

▶ BE AWARE OF WHAT THE PERSON LOOKING AT YOU IS SEEING.

Most of the time, we do not think too much about what other people are seeing. Beyond hair, clothes, and a check in the mirror, once we get started with work we are thinking more about being heard than seen. To start off well, face the person. This is especially important to someone who is Deaf. Remember, **what a Deaf person sees is the message.** What you are doing and how you present yourself is part of your message whether it is intentional or by default. If you are impatient, angry, or frustrated, your face will reflect that. **Be intentional.** Be open and curious when the next person makes contact. Curiosity is interest. Curiosity can convey a willingness to collaborate. It will be reflected in your face when your intention is to collaborate. The next person you meet might be Deaf. And, if not, you will be seen at your best anyway.

▶ BE PATIENT.

Repeatedly, Deaf interviewed for this workbook commented about the impatience of hearing people. Starting an interaction is difficult for many of us. Some of us communicate directly, others indirectly. Some of us know exactly

what we want and others do not know what is available. Getting started is not always smooth. When a language is not shared, it will take even longer to get started and **both parties need to practice patience.**

(These questions never end.)

Talk about this: *How do people experience me when I'm distracted or impatient? The question is not about how you are on your best day, but how you are when you are not at your best. Your coworkers know all of your efforts and can average things out. The next person you have contact with has just that much of you to decide whether you can be trusted to help or not. The questions again are: How do people experience me when I'm distracted or impatient? What would they see? And then, what could I do to improve their experience?*

► **CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE**

Some of the panic or impatience hearing people experience when a Deaf person shows up is the result of forgetting that **you do not have to take care of everything or to carry on alone.** Your initial purpose is to be competent and confident. The goal is to figure out how to find out what someone needs and how you can be of assistance. Avoid getting too far ahead of the moment. When we jump ahead in our heads, we lose our composure and our ability to focus on the person and how to establish basic contact.

► **TO GET STARTED LET YOUR PARTNER LEAD**

The Deaf person contacting you will probably have had more experience interacting with hearing people than you have had communicating with Deaf. When someone knows how to do a dance that you have not practiced, it makes sense to allow yourself to be led. Observe. To observe includes listening and watching. What clues is this person giving you? Is she pointing to her ears to indicate that she is Deaf? Is he gesturing a pen across his palm as though writing, as though asking for a paper and pencil? Is the person using sign language or talking, even though you do not understand? Follow the leader. What is the message, even if you do not understand it literally? Will you need a way to communicate other than or in addition to speech? The Deaf person most likely assumes that assistance will not be immediate, so you have time to exhale and explore this question.

► **BE HONEST (don't fake it).**

Acknowledge what you understand, but maybe even more important, **do not pretend to understand what you do not.** At this time, your successful support is not measured by getting everything right, but by how well you connect with the

other person. If she believes that you are being rude, that you are not taking her seriously, or that you are being dismissive, why would she stay around? Your honest and humble actions to find a way to understand her will be appreciated.

► **BE PREPARED.**

Some offices now keep a list of languages on the front desk or posted in a lobby so that people who might need an oral language interpreter can point to the language they understand when they arrive. That is a welcome sign to people who know there might not be someone available immediately who shares their language. Think about **what might be welcoming, or at least comforting, to someone who is Deaf**. Paper and pencil, or a white-board and erasable markers might be left in view and for use by anyone who wants it. A TTY or other communication technology can be kept out in the open, as compared to being locked in a closet and out of view. The message you want to convey is, *we anticipate contact with Deaf*. Know your own resources and the resources that are available in your community.

► **ASK FOR BACK-UP**

If you have more than one person at a time to attend to, or phones are ringing, it seems expedient to move your attention to the situations that are easiest, in this situation, to the hearing person. When that happens the message seen by Deaf is, *you are not important to me / us*. Have a plan with others where you work to provide back-up assistance when things get busy and you are trying to establish contact with someone. **When there is a language difference, it will take longer than usual.**

► **MAKE THE LEAST RISKY ASSUMPTIONS YOU CAN.**

When you expect that people will only communicate and behave within a certain pattern of sounds and movements, you will be startled and feel unable to do your best work, when those expectations are violated. Do not assume a lack of intelligence or legitimate need. Do not assume that you cannot help and that there are special places and people to help Deaf. One least risky assumption you can make is that the person making contact with your organization has a legitimate need for what you have to offer. Another least risky assumption is that with patience, curiosity, and humility **you will be able to figure out what is needed in collaboration with the Deaf person**. Always ask. As reported, *your questions help us believe you care about us and want to help instead of make assumptions*. Deaf would rather be asked.

► THE INTERPRETER

It is recommended that you seek the services of a nationally certified interpreter. Not everyone who has learned ASL is qualified to be an interpreter. Being an ASL Interpreter is a professional role with requisite training.

Ask the Deaf person if s/he has a preferred interpreter. You might not be aware of all the considerations that go into a person's choice for a specific interpreter and you do not need to have all of that information. (But, think about it: Would you want the same person at a doctor's appointment, at your bank, at the PTA meeting, at the... Would you want the same interpreter as the one who interprets for the person who has been abusing you?) **It is responsible and respectful to ask a Deaf person if there is a specific person to be contacted or a preferred route for identifying an interpreter.**

► ASKING AND ANSWERING WITHOUT A SHARED LANGUAGE

Extending a paper and pencil with raised eyebrows can be as effective as saying, *would you like to write a message?* So, you might offer something to write on - paper and pencil, a white board and an erasable marker, a keyboard.

Remember, writing in English for Deaf is more than writing in a second language. When you learn a spoken language with a corresponding written form, you learn that speech has a code. Sounds have corresponding written symbols. When you learn a visual language there is no sound. When Deaf learn to write in English, it is a huge leap. It is learning a visual form of a sound-based language that you cannot hear or "sound out". A Deaf reader has to learn a word order and memorize spelling with no sound references. Some Deaf will read better and others not at all. This ability should never be confused with indications of intelligence. The written language that a Deaf person uses might help you gauge how you write back. Follow the leader.

You might say *do we need an interpreter? Or, Interpreter?*

You might write *need interpreter? Or, Interpreter?*

You might write *I call interpreter. Yes* ___ *No* ___

If this seems to be too much guesswork or too amateurish, make yourself comfortable. **Sometimes, we are amateurs.** We can be prepared amateurs or clueless amateurs. We can always be respectful and responsible amateurs.

Generally, we understand that common gestures used by hearing people are not sufficient for substantive exchanges, but they can be communicative for brief messages. For example a thumb to the ear and a finger toward the mouth will

be understood by most people as a phone call. If I typically ask someone if she wants water or coffee, I might show the two choices to a Deaf person and gesture like a model on the Price is Right to ask if she would like either of them. If I point to myself, then point down a hall toward offices, then touch my watch and hold up five fingers, most people would understand that sequence of gestures as *I'm going down there for five minutes*. When you are trying to provide a brief message, try a combination of non-speech methods that includes gestures, written words, demonstration, or pictures. **Your Deaf communication partner will let you know what is helpful and valued.**

► **WRITE IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT IS WRITTEN.**

Do not assume or depend on literacy skills. General advice is to be brief and to the point. Simple rather than compound sentences are preferred. Make one point per sentence. It is recommended that you avoid narrative lists of things to do. For information, "bullet" style lists are better. Questions, too, should be asked one at a time. Do not pad your remarks with nonessential details. People who speak English can be very wordy in the name of diplomacy. **It is OK and even preferred that you are brief, direct, even blunt**, without sacrificing important and relevant information.

► **KNOW YOUR SIGNING LIMITS**

If you are interested, take classes in ASL. Deaf, like people who use languages other than English, appreciate when efforts are made to learn a few words or phrases in ASL. However, you would not try to conduct a significant interview with someone who speaks Spanish, when you know a few words and phrases. Do not try to spell your questions one letter at a time even though you know how. **It is an act of respect to know your limits.**

► **INFORM THE DEAF PERSON WHAT YOU ARE DOING.**

Try not to assume that a Deaf person will understand what is happening without your deliberate attempt to explain. First, **decide together** what you will do by following the person's lead. Then, try to let her know what you are about to do, and after, what you have done. Remember, she is not overhearing. If you are using other communication devices to contact someone, **let the Deaf person know what you are going to do and what you have done.**

► **HOW DOES A GOOD HOST SAY, AND NOW, WE WAIT?**

Talk about this: How could you tell someone who is Deaf, *I called the interpreter, she can be here in about 3 hours. You can wait over there. (Or, she is not available until tomorrow at 10 AM)*

Waiting is one of the things we all have to do. Even when we do not want to wait, hearing people are usually informed about why they are waiting and if we ask, we are told for about how long. The "good host" knows that time is important and would provide such information without being asked. The good host would take into account that a Deaf person is not overhearing internal communications or external calls that are being made. The good host would try to be especially helpful during a period of waiting. **Give on-going status reports** when having a Deaf person wait.

Avoid walking away from a Deaf person **without first trying to communicate to the best of your ability what is happening.** Be aware of time and how long it might take you or someone else before direct assistance can be provided. The fears that someone might have when seeking assistance due to violence in their lives can be increased in the absence of information. When you have been treated as though your thoughts are not smart or believable and someone walks away, it is reasonable for concern and maybe even fear to arise.

You might be waiting for an interpreter. An interpreter might have called to inform you of a later than expected arrival time. Do your best to inform the Deaf person who is waiting. Try drawing a picture of a face clock with the new arrival time.

► **WHAT IS IN YOUR CLIENT AREAS?**

Are there materials that might be of interest or of value for someone with no reading abilities or limited reading abilities? (It is not only Deaf who might not read well.) If a television set is available, is it set for captions? Some organizations provide informational videos that explain the organization. If there are videos, are they captioned? **ASL users appreciate videos that are interpreted in ASL.** Consider presenting informational materials on video or on a CD-ROM in ASL.

► **GET OVER STAGE FRIGHT AND FIRST TIME NERVES BY PRACTICING**

If you are someone who embarrasses easily or feels anxious when you are not operating in familiar and comfortable ways, you should practice. Chances are good that you could find a Deaf person willing to help you and others in your organization to increase your comfort with these initial connections. Practice

because you will feel better. **Practice to increase your comfort.** Practice because your comfort will increase someone else's comfort at a difficult time. Practice so that you can feel embarrassed and have a sense of humor at the same time.

► **CHILDREN ARE CHILDREN.**

Only ask the children of a Deaf parent the questions you would ask children of hearing parents. In other words, do not ask children to explain what their parents mean or ask questions that you would typically direct to the hearing adult. This is recommended for a variety of reasons. **Children should know that their parents are respected** by other adults. Children should not be led to believe that they are perceived as better informed or smarter than their parents. Children should not see their parents shamed or feel embarrassed for making responsible contacts in the community. **Children should be treated as children.** When there is a situation of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking the children are affected and might need direct support themselves. Avoid using the hearing children of a Deaf parent as an interpreter, formal or informal. When necessary, wait for a professional to assist in your communication with the parent.

► **DEAF ADVOCATES**

In cases of domestic violence or sexual assault, it can be helpful to have someone to help a person through the process, to understand what is happening and what can be anticipated. An advocate is sometimes available to hearing people. There are not enough Deaf functioning in this role, but in the years to come this will change. An advocate is a different role than an interpreter.

Remember, the interpreter enables Deaf and hearing people to communicate. A Deaf advocate has direct, supportive conversation with the Deaf person. Deaf advocates should not be perceived as competition for organization staff. **Deaf advocates can be valuable partners** sharing a common mission to ensure that Deaf victims and survivors get the services they need. Check with your local resources to find out if there are Deaf advocates in your area. For those who want to be proactive, you might decide to team up with others in your area to recruit and train Deaf advocates.

► **HAVE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS**

When communication is more challenging or we perceive interaction with someone as being more difficult or uncomfortable, we often use default thinking. What this means is that we like to expect that if we tell someone something once they will remember and understand it. Common sense would usually be enough to make this an unrealistic expectation. Add to that the circumstances

that might be at play, including high stress and secondary languages, and it is even more reasonable to assume that someone will not remember or understand what is communicated the first time. **Expect to repeat yourself - patiently -** and verify that important information is understood and remembered.

► **VERIFY**

Whatever method of communication you are using, including an interpreter, share the responsibility to verify that messages are understood. Avoid asking, *do you understand* and then trusting what looks like an affirmative response. **Watch for multiple indications of understanding.** Previously, you read about a person being told that she had a *positive* medical test. She nodded. Would you expect to see nodding and a big smile from someone who understood that her medical tests came back positive? Did it seem that your information was satisfying or helpful? Are you seeing an expression of confusion or frustration? Are you seeing a slightly (or greatly) strained expression that is still nodding? Is there a follow up message from the Deaf person that seems unrelated to your conversation? When you have provided some information, you might follow with questions such as:

What do you think about my comments?

What would you like to do about it?

What can I do to help?

What will you do next?

► **LET THE STORY UNFOLD**

Deaf report that when they get the chance to tell someone what has happened, there might be a lot of details and a lot to tell. Allow the story to unfold rather than trying to get it told to you in a certain way. When you ask a question, **wait for a complete answer.** It might take longer but you also might learn more.

► **CONSIDERATION OF PARITY**

Domestic violence and sexual assault advocates are rightly known for providing victims/survivors with comprehensive information that supports a woman's right to make decisions about her life, safety, and healing. When professionals work with victims/survivors who use ASL, too often they do not share all of the same information they would with hearing victims, due to time constraints or lack of patience. **Deaf victims need all of the same information as hearing victims** to make informed choices about services, support, options and safety.

Another aspect of limited information sharing occurs in a more informal context when a Deaf victim participates in support groups, resides in shelter or participates in any other agency activities that involve more than one-to-one

communication. A Deaf victim in these circumstances often experiences isolation from others participating in the same activity because of the communication barriers that exist between individuals who communicate with different languages. While having an ASL interpreter available can lessen the isolation, it does not eliminate it. This isolating impact often affects a Deaf victim's comfort and response to assistance and those around her who are hearing. **Be mindful of this isolation, and be creative in responding to its presence.**

► **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**

Think about your role within your organization. Think about your job description - whether paid or volunteer. There are activities you are not expected to master. You do not have to become proficient in all languages or cultures to do your jobs well. You cannot do or offer more than your job permits or your training allows. **Take the pressure off.** Decide to do what you do well and learn how that can be extended to people who are Deaf.

► **WHAT NEXT?**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires that Deaf have equal access to public services. You took the time to get this far in a workbook designed to help you think about your work in relation to providing support and or services to people who are Deaf. Now what? Think about what you have noticed or learned while participating in discussion and trying to respond to the questions you have considered. Without a plan, we might have interesting thoughts. **With a plan we might begin to have better, more helpful experiences with Deaf.**

Talk about this: What do you personally want to do to become more comfortable and better prepared to interact with Deaf who might contact you for assistance?

What will you do first?

Talk about this: What does your organization have to do to become better prepared to support Deaf who might contact you for assistance?

What will you do first?

SUMMARY

Most people hear. Most of our customs and practices regarding hospitality, safety and security, and sharing information are based on sound. We forget about *hearing* because we assume hearing. We do not think about visual language. We do not think about bright, compassionate, and intelligent Deaf people who have full lives, language, and culture without hearing. We have to think about their need for information, support, and services when their lives are touched by violence. We also have to think about the prevention education that helps people understand the dynamics of power and control.

**UNTIL WE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH EASE,
WE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH AWKWARDNESS.**

There has probably never been a better time for Deaf and hearing people to communicate and collaborate with one another. The technology and personal resources can allow communication with much greater ease than ever before. There are still barriers for many people. With awareness and patience, we can all do better when Deaf and hearing meet. Until we can communicate with ease, we can communicate with awkwardness. What is most important is that people who need information and assistance in relation to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking receive it.

APPENDIX A:

Information for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Service Providers About Interpreting Services for Deaf Victims

Sign Language Interpreters:

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandates that Deaf people have equal access to public services. In domestic violence and sexual assault situations, service providers, courts, police departments and hospitals are required to provide communication access services to Deaf victims. A critical, and often foremost, element of communication access is sign language interpreters who are qualified and can effectively and impartially convey messages between hearing and deaf parties.

Things to Know About Interpreting Services:

- **Nationally certified interpreters** are highly recommended and in Wisconsin, there are approximately 100 interpreters who hold certifications from national interpreting bodies: the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the National Association of the Deaf. A list of certified interpreters can be found in the website of the Department of Health and Family Services, Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), which is listed in the Resource Section at the end of this paper. If a nationally certified interpreter is not found, state verified interpreters may be used, with discretion. ODHH maintains a list of state verified interpreters that hold Levels 1 and 2 of the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA). The ODHH website has a list of **WITA interpreters** with Levels 1 and 2.
- There are **interpreting service agencies** in Wisconsin who can assist in finding interpreters. The ODHH website has a list of agencies.
- It would be an appropriate and respectful protocol to ask the Deaf victim his or her interpreter preferences, provided that they are nationally certified or state verified WITA Levels 1 or 2.
- Two nationally certified interpreters would be necessary for situations that are complicated, longer than two hours, or if there are complex communication or interpersonal dynamics. Such situations may be, but not limited to: a meeting with a lawyer; a court proceeding; a counseling or therapy session; or group therapy. Interpreting is a physically and mentally demanding activity and can contribute to exhaustion and injury. Having two interpreters would assure optimal service, and that the Deaf person has equal access to communication and information.

- One interpreter may be used in simple situations if they are short in duration: for example, intake, regular doctor appointment, or a tour of a shelter.
- It is important to consider that for court proceedings, separate teams of **legally certified interpreters** ought to be used for all Deaf parties, including plaintiff, defendant and witnesses. This guarantees individual confidentiality and prevents information from inadvertently being transmitted by the interpreter between parties. It also assures that interpreters are available for private conferences with attorneys. Interpreters used in court settings must also be specially certified for legal interpreting. The cost of qualified interpreters can be high; however, the cost of missed information, misunderstandings, and limited access is almost always higher.

Certified Deaf Interpreters:

Not all Deaf people grew up using American Sign Language, the natural language of many Deaf people in North America. There are Deaf people who grew up in systems with no or minimal access to language, and often were deprived of fundamental education. There are other Deaf people who are immigrants from other countries; they may have used their own country's Sign Language or may not have any language at all.

As a result, regular ASL interpreters are not adequate or appropriate accommodations for these individuals. There are many linguistic and non-linguistic nuances that are not captured by regular interpreters, but can be captured by a Deaf person. Thus, there is a growing field of Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI). They are trained interpreters who are Deaf, who have a high level of skill with gestural and visual languages. They are used as intermediaries with Deaf individuals who do not use or have a minimal use of ASL. In this scenario, an ASL interpreter may be employed to interpret for the hearing parties and the CDI. The CDI would then interpret the information into either the visual or gestural language the Deaf person uses.

Code of Ethics:

All interpreters are bound by the Code of Ethics, established by the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, which emphasizes confidentiality, neutrality, discretion, and the ability to interpret for effectively, accurately and impartially in ASL and English. All nationally certified and state verified interpreters have passed the written examination of the Code of Ethics.

State and National Interpreting Resources in Wisconsin:

- Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/sensory>)
- National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (www.rid.org)

APPENDIX B:

Information for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Service Providers About Communication Technology for Deaf Victims

Video Phones and Video Relay Service (VRS):

The Deaf Community is very excited about a new videophone technology. This technology allows Deaf people to use their home computer or TV (depending on the system they use), a camera, and a high speed internet connection to communicate in American Sign Language (ASL). Deaf people videophone each other directly.

Deaf people can also use their videophone to call people, services, and businesses through a Video Relay Service (VRS). The deaf caller connects with an ASL interpreter on the television or computer screen. The interpreter then calls the number the Deaf caller wants to contact, and interprets for both parties. The Deaf and hearing parties have a normal conversation (using first person language) with the interpreter.

Hearing callers can also make video relay calls to any deaf individual. Video relay services are listed in the "Resources" section at the end of this handout.

Deaf people favor videophoning or using VRS over a TTY to make calls, since they can use their natural language (ASL) instead of written English. It is a more expedient way to conduct business or a conversation. Having to type messages is often very tedious for Deaf people. Using written English on a TTY also means all intonation and "personality" in the conversation is lost; in a videophone conversation, these elements are not lost.

Not all Deaf people like or can use a Video Relay Service or a videophone. There are other devices that are used, like a TTY or Captel. A Captel is a device that is similar to a TTY, only that a Deaf (or hard of hearing) person who can use speech and is comfortable with English uses a telephone (which is attached to the device) in the same way as using a traditional phone. The caller is automatically connected to a captioning service. When the person on the other end answers, the Deaf person reads the text that is transcribed by a trained operator at a CaptelSM captioning service. The text is seen on a bright, easy-to-read display built into the Captel device. Another communication tool that Deaf people use is a paging service. There are many devices now available but some services may be more limited than others, or some parts of the state do not have coverage.

Impact of Telecommunications on Domestic Violence Services:

An emotionally distraught Deaf person may want to call a Deaf friend or advocate and a TTY may not be effective, for the reason that a typed message does not fully convey the Deaf person's emotions and intent, or the Deaf person struggles with written English. Or, a Deaf person wants to call a lawyer, and prefers to use a VRS. A

videophone, again, could make things less stressful and give the Deaf person a sense of control of her situation.

A TTY, as is commonplace, may be unused, underused or needing repairs and stored somewhere. Some places have high staff turnover, and TTY training and familiarity is not always consistent.

Communication Technology: Risks

While Deaf and hard of hearing people are enjoying the benefits of advanced communication technology, there are risks especially for those experiencing domestic abuse or violence and they may be overwhelmed with their situation and therefore not thinking through to ensure their own safety. It will be important for service providers and advocates to become aware of the communication technology that Deaf and hard of hearing people use and understand the potential risks. Please contact DHFSDeafUnity@wisconsin.gov to request information or training on communication technology and risks they may involve. More information can also be found on the website of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (www.wcadv.org), under What We Do > Education in the Members section (you must have a log-in and password to view the Members sections).

Resources:

Video Relay Services:

Sprint VRS: <https://www.sprintvrs.com>

Sorenson VRS: <http://www.sorensonvrs.com>

Hands on VRS: www.hovrs.com

Hamilton Relay www.hamiltonrelay.com

CSD VRS: www.csdvrs.com

Other Communication Technology:

Ultratec., Inc.: <http://www.captionedtelephone.com/index.phtml> (for Captel information)

APPENDIX C

Questions for Discussion

Talk About These

In case you missed these the first time, in context, here they are again.

1. Think about the ordinary grocery store, paper or plastic, experience. What might some of the problems be for someone who is Deaf? Think beyond the obvious factor of hearing.
2. When you first heard that a medical lab test came back positive, what did you think? Positive is a good word, isn't it? In a medical context, positive can mean the presences of something that is not healthy. How did you learn that positive in a medical context is not always a good thing?
3. Imagine you are participating in research to determine what factors are most likely to cause people to give up and terminate an interaction. Think about all of your senses; what you hear, see, feel, etc. Sometimes, people approach or contact you and sometimes you contact them.

What specific factors might actually have caused you to stop trying to continue with an interaction - to want to escape?

4. How did you learn that some but not all parents hit their children?
How did you learn that adults, even parents, are not supposed to touch a teenage girl's breasts?
How did you learn that most adults do not ask children to keep secrets?
How did you learn that love is not contingent on sexual contact?
How did you learn that doing whatever you are told is not a way to show that you love an intimate partner?
How did you learn that someone yelling at you and calling you names is not for your own good?
How did you learn to define domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and stalking?
How did you learn about being treated well, with respect, in all of your relationships?
How did you learn about your legal rights, advocates, and planning for your own safety?
5. Some of you describe yourselves as Italian American, African American, Native American, Mexican American, Irish American, Christian, Jewish, gay, straight, urban, rural, or maybe from "up north" in Wisconsin. What does identification with a community, a culture, or a people mean to you? What distinguishes you from those who are not of the same community or culture?

6. Notice whether you recognize yourself in any of the examples below (see p. 17-18). Imagine how it would seem to you if any of the descriptions below were happening to you? What might you be thinking and feeling? How might you respond?
7. In any of the situations described above (see p. 18-19) what might make it possible or easier for Deaf to initiate an interaction with hearing people?
8. Make a list of things that good hosts do and talk about why they do those things. What do good hosts hope to accomplish?
9. When you meet someone, what do you do to help that person feel respected and safe? How do you assess whether your actions are being experienced as respectful and helpful?
10. When meeting a Deaf person, what did you notice about her/him? What thoughts came into your mind? How did you feel, what physical sensations did you notice? What did you do?
12. How would it affect you if people did not respond to you in ways that made sense? What if this was not the first time this happened to you? If this kind of behavior by others was all too familiar rather than a singular unsatisfying experience, how would it influence your expectations and your behavior?
13. What assumptions do you make (or have you heard others make) about Deaf? Talk about assumptions related to Deaf in general and the following in particular: reading lips, reading and writing English, speech, hearing, education, use of ASL, intelligence, intimate relationships between hearing and Deaf, credibility to report, ability to raise children.
14. What can you do to help a person who is Deaf feel respected and safe? What does a good host avoid doing and why?
15. What could you do when you notice or suspect that someone is hard of hearing?
16. Why do you think a Deaf person might have strong feelings about selecting an interpreter?
17. How do people experience me when I'm distracted or impatient? The question is not about how you are on your best day, but how you are when you are not at your best. Your coworkers know all of your efforts and can average things out. The next person you have contact with has just that much of you to decide whether you can be trusted to help or not. The question again is: How do people experience me when I'm distracted or impatient? What would they see? And then, what could I do to improve their experience.

18. How could you tell someone who is Deaf, "I called the interpreter, she can be here in about 3 hours. You can wait over there." (Or, "she is not available until tomorrow at 10 AM").

19. What do you personally want to do to become more comfortable and better prepared to interact with Deaf who might contact you for assistance?

What will you do first?

20. What does your organization have to do to become better prepared to support Deaf who might contact you for assistance?

What will you do first?