



United Methodist Committee of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries

A BRIEF GUIDE TO DEAFBLIND INTERPRETING

This resource document introduces DeafBlind interpreting that includes considerations, expectations, and other helpful factors to be aware of.

MODE DEFINITIONS

Visual Frame/Box Signing: Normally the sign box is between the signer's shoulders from the chest to the face. With DeafBlind people who have tunnel vision the sign box is much smaller and more restricted.

Close Vision: With close vision interpreting, the interpreter may use restricted movements as above or may use a larger signing space but with the interpreter sitting very near the DeafBlind person.

Tracking: The DeafBlind person will hold the interpreter's wrist(s) in order to keep the signs within the person's field of vision.

Tactile Signing: Tactile signing is used by those who have very little residual vision or are totally blind. The DeafBlind person will place their hand(s) on top of the interpreter's hand(s) in order to read the signs via touch.

Tactile Fingerspelling/Rochester Method:

The Deafblind person will place their hand on the interpreter's hand and the interpreter will fingerspell everything.

MAKING CONTACT

- a. If approaching visually and there is no response indicating that the person knows you are there, gently place your hand on the person's hand or arm and leave it there so that they can easily locate you.
- b. Always let the person who is DeafBlind know you are (identify yourself).
- c. The DeafBlind person will likely let you know his or her preferred method of communication.

MOBILITY AND ACCESS

- a. Some Deafblind people may require a sighted guide and learning guide techniques is helpful. Ask, don't assume, if it is needed.
- b. Offer sighted guiding by placing your hand on the top/back of the person's hand or elbow; if the person requires a sighted guide, he or she will generally move his or her hand up your arm to your elbow and lightly grip your arm just above the elbow joint. This grip will position the DeafBlind person a safe half-pace behind you.
- c. Never grab the DeafBlind person's hand or arm to pull or steer them, and never push the person in front of you.
- d. Advise the DeafBlind person of any dangerous obstacles, steps or narrow passages.
- e. Avoid communicating or interpreting while walking.



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LENGTH OF ASSIGNMENT AND BREAKS

- a. Two interpreters may be required to allow for breaks if the assignment is for one hour or more.
- b. It is very important to remember that the DeafBlind person may also require a break.
- c. Due to the physical requirements of tactile interpreting, the interpreter may need to move away from the DeafBlind person to ensure a real break. Discuss this prior to starting the interpreting assignment.
- d. Don't leave a DeafBlind person standing unless he or she wants to stand. Always let the Deafblind person know you stepped away.

INTERPRETING

- a. Identify who is speaking by name (don't point). For example, "Store greeter."
- b. Interpret physical surroundings, social cues, who is there, the room set up, the number of people, and any objects in the room. Inform them of any new arrivals or if anyone has left.
- c. Be aware of head nods, head shakes, and furrowed eye brows, as these are non-manual signs and may not be observed by the Deafblind person.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

- a. It's important to know of any individual needs.
- b. Inquire to how they wish to communicate (e.g. tactile, close vision, etc.).
- c. Your hands convey your mood and even your personality.

SEATING

- a. Try to set up the seating in advance.
- b. Ergonomic seating with good back support is important.
- c. For tactile signing, some DeafBlind people prefer sitting face to face with elbows resting on a table; others prefer side by side or corner to corner. Ask for seating preferences.

CLOTHING

- a. Good contrast between skin color and clothing is important to distinguish signs clearly against background. The most acceptable clothing colors for a dark-skinned person include cream, pastel blues, yellows, greens, etc. For a light-skinned person, acceptable colors are black, navy blue, forest green, chocolate brown, etc. No RED tops should be worn. Red can cause eye fatigue and may be difficult for a DeafBlind person to look at for any length of time. Additional clothing, such as gloves, may be needed depending on the person's need.
- b. Tops must be plain with no designs of any sort and without zippers, brooches or shiny buttons. A contrasting top must completely cover any clothing of similar color to skin tone that might be worn underneath.
- c. Necklines should be of "crew" height, turtlenecks, mock turtlenecks or "business shirt" style.

LIGHTING

- a. Appropriate lighting can be a critical issue for DeafBlind people relying on residual vision.
- b. Avoid glare, cluttered backgrounds and spotlights directed toward the DeafBlind person. Make sure DeafBlind person's back is toward the light source.
- c. Be aware of audio-visual presentations where lights are dimmed or turned off. This can be very distressing for a DeafBlind person who has night-blindness or other eye conditions affected by changes in lighting.



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PERSONAL HYGENE

- a. This sensitive area requires special consideration from both the point of view of the DeafBlind person and the interpreter as DeafBlind interpreting often requires close proximity and/or contact.
- b. Smoke, perspiration odor or strong food odors such as garlic, onions or coffee can be particularly distracting for the DeafBlind person or for the interpreter.
- c. Strong perfumes or aftershave should be avoided and personal care products should be non-scented or as minimally scented as possible.

* The United Methodist Committee on Deaf and Hard of Hearing wishes to thank the Michigan Coalition for Deaf and Hard of Hearing for sharing their online resource.

Reference

Guas, J. and Florence, I. (2004). DeafBlind Interpreting Guidelines. Retrieved from http://www.michdhh.org/deaf_hard_of_hearing/doc/NTFDBI-DeafBlind-Interpreting-Guidelines.pdf.



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