



# Deaf Culture



## **The Deaf are not dumb or mentally deficient.**

In speaking of the Deaf it is improper to use the term "Deaf and dumb." The original meaning of the word "dumb" was "cannot speak." But words do have a way of changing meaning and this word "dumb" has done just that. Today the word "dumb" means "stupid." The Deaf are not stupid. Therefore, the word "dumb" should not be used when speaking of Deaf people.

## **The Deaf are not mute.**

"Mute" means "silent." The fact that a person cannot hear does not necessarily mean he cannot speak. The Deaf lack the ability to use their voices simply because they cannot hear how to use them. Any part of the body not used becomes stiff and unusable. So it is with the Deaf person's voice. The Deaf need to be taught how to use their voices.

## **All Deaf can be taught to speak.**

Some Deaf people speak a great deal, others only little. But all can be taught to speak at least some. Often parents are led to believe that teaching their Deaf child to speak will make him perfectly normal. But in spite of what many educators say, Deaf children need special education. Deafness is a handicap.

## **The greatest need of the Deaf is language.**

The Deaf person needs to be taught the proper use of the English language in reading, writing, and speaking. Every means possible should be employed to help the Deaf person grasp a better understanding of the written word. Teaching the Deaf child is a difficult task because much of our language is acquired through hearing. Parents should be eager for all methods to be used in conveying this all-important need of language skills to their child. Speech, speech reading, fingerspelling, signs, written language, and hearing aids are among the methods which should be used to train the young Deaf child.

## **Silence affects the Deaf**

Deafness places a person in complete silence; this affects him physically, emotionally, educationally, socially, spiritually, and economically. Since parents, loved ones, and friends cannot understand him/her, the Deaf person becomes frustrated, lives in a world of his/her own, and often acts rather strange. Many times he/she is placed in a mental hospital. This is unnecessary, however, when those close to the Deaf person learn to communicate with him/her.

**In order for a Deaf person to learn, someone must have the time and patience to teach him.**

The Deaf person knows only what someone has taken time to teach him. We learn much in an accidental way in our everyday routine and associations. Don't be surprised if a Deaf person is not aware of a simple fact or saying you learned as a simple fact growing up.

**There are different means of educating the Deaf**

There are several schools of thought regarding Deaf education.

The **manual method** teaches by fingerspelling and use of the Sign Language.

The **oral method** was the most emphasized means of teaching Deaf children in the past. Parents want to believe the promise, "Teach your Deaf child to speak and lip-read, and he will be just like a normal child. But lip-reading is far more difficult than most people seem to realize. Probably not one in a thousand orally taught Deaf can understand all that is said via the lips. Many words look alike on the lips. "Man" and "mat," "You" and "do," "Me" and "be," and hundreds of others.

**Sign Accents.**

You will often find that many Deaf are sloppy and lazy in their use of signs. This is partly because they are not taught proper signing in school. However, there are some Deaf people who sign gracefully and beautifully, just as there are people with beautiful speaking voices who enunciate more clearly than others. Also, there are Deaf people who seem to have a special talent for "singing"; they can make a song come to life as they gracefully sign the song with rhythm.

**We all sign.**

All of us use signs a great deal more than we realize. We gesture to get our point across and we use vigorous motions when we are angry. Babies understand signs long before they understand spoken words. A mother says to her baby, "Come to me." As she says these words she usually puts out her hands and motions for the baby to come. It is the motioning that the baby first obeys, rather than the spoken word. If you have ever traveled in a foreign country you probably have found yourself using signs. Through Sign Language you can communicate your wants and needs.

**Deaf people are happy when we know signs.**

Deaf people live in a world of loneliness. Many of them have said to me, "How come you know signs-you can hear?" I always explain I have a Deaf daughter, and that is why I learned the language of the Deaf. Often they reply, "Yes, but my mother doesn't know signs!" They are always pleased to meet hearing people who take interest in their culture and know their language. Even if you are not completely fluent, they are patient and pleased with your effort and are always happy to help you learn.

## Deaf people take everything literally.

It is hard for the Deaf to understand slang or plays on words. Many words in the Bible such as "thine..... thou..... thee," and "behold" are foreign to Deaf people. Jokes are often difficult for the Deaf to understand as well. It is important to think of the concept and meaning instead of strict word translating.

## Communication tips

- DON'T assume the Deaf with hearing aids can hear you. Hearing aids help more the hard-of-hearing. Sound may be increased but the understanding of speech may remain unimproved.
- DON'T allow another hearing person to interrupt your conversation with a Deaf person. If you must, excuse yourself momentarily.
- DON'T talk about the Deaf person in front of him. This is rude.
- DON'T pretend to understand the Deaf person if you don't. They will not be offended if you don't understand. You can simply sign "again" if you missed it or "slow" if the Deaf person is signing too fast.
- Be aware that the Deaf person will be watching your signs as well non-manual cues.
- ☞ DON'T cover your mouth or turn your head when speaking.
- ☞ DON'T exaggerate your mouth movements or raise your voice. They're Deaf!
- ☞ DO Speak naturally and clearly. Don't mumble!
- ☞ DO use increase facial expression that you normally would.
- ☞ DO use natural gestures.
- ☞ DO Be careful not to give "mixed-messages."
- DO be perceptive to the sign language the Deaf person is using. Deaf people as a group use ASL as their language. However, there are some exceptions, depending on individual upbringing, where a Deaf person might use more Signed English or a Pidgin Sign. Be flexible enough to adapt your signing so that you will be able to understand each other.
- DON'T confuse poor speech or English with lack of intelligence. Because of their handicap, many Deaf people have been deprived of the education most hearing children receive as they grow up resulting in a lower educational level.



## A Model of Deaf Culture

This model was developed to show the different aspects of Deaf culture. One may gain entry into the Deaf culture through one of these aspects. Some are involved in more than one aspect.

**Audiological:** in order to be a member of Deaf culture, one must have a hearing loss.

**Social:** there is significance in the degree to which a person associates with Deaf people such as attending a school for the Deaf, marrying a Deaf person, going to a Deaf club, community events for the Deaf, etc.

**Political:** the extent to which a person wields power in the Deaf community affairs. An example would be serving as an officer in a Deaf organization.

**Linguistic:** one of the most important; the extent to which the individual uses and supports the use of ASL. ASL is the central feature of Deaf culture. It is the "glue" that holds it together.

\* Among all four aspects is **attitude**. Deaf people are aware of other Deaf people's as well as hearing people's attitudes. A proper attitude is one that embraces and cherishes the experience, values, and language of the Deaf. Without proper a attitude, one cannot gain entry into Deaf culture.

