

## Thinking about the workplace for your D/deaf colleagues

### Terminology

**D/deaf** is used throughout to describe people who are Deaf (have been Deaf all their lives, pre-lingually deaf and use sign language) and deaf (who are hard of hearing, have severe hearing limitations but who have English as their first language and may lipread and/or use hearing aids). D/deaf is often used as a short cut to describe both groups who are similar but not exactly the same when it comes to communication.



**Inclusion** is proactive, thoughtful and considered. It means ensuring that everyone feels part of the group, structure of an organisation and are reflected in processes/policies and frameworks. It means everyone needs to assess their behaviours and actions to ensure they are not excluding anyone. Everyone has experienced being excluded at some point in their lives; if you don't like it when it happens to you, don't do it to someone else.

### Preparation, preparation, preparation

(1) D/deaf people get information in smaller chunks. Hearing people are able to absorb more information more quickly at work. This is because D/deaf people do not always have access to all the different ways people communicate at work – many get left behind.

(2) Make sure your department is assessed before a new D/deaf colleague joins your team. This demonstrates your commitment to long-term support and ensures they can hit the ground running. Make sure there is access to alternative forms of communication, for example vibrating listening devices, flashing signs for fire alarms, pin badges and information resources on how to be inclusive.

(3) Most hold unchallenged stereotypical views about D/deaf people. Make sure you encourage as many members of your team to receive awareness training.

(5) Have you considered the office layout? Noisy open plan offices with a lot of feedback noise will invariably cause problems for someone who is D/deaf. Have you considered making all your offices access friendly regardless of disability?

## The basics: how do I communicate inclusively?



1. Make sure you have face-to-face contact. Look at the person, even when video conferencing.
2. Do not cover your mouth with your hands while speaking; the person will not be able to lip read.
3. Always get the listener's attention before you start speaking – wave or tap them on the arm.
4. Speak clearly, use natural facial expressions and gestures. Do not speak excessively slowly and do not exaggerate your lip movements – it makes it harder to lipread.
5. Remember to talk directly to the person you are communicating with.
6. There is no need to shout – it can be uncomfortable for those using a hearing aid.
7. Make sure you are positioned well to aid lipreading and reduce background noise, distractions and excessive feedback (e.g. from wooden floors, printers, loud conversations in the background).
8. Make sure there is no strong light behind you as this will make it hard to see you - you will be in the shadow and your face will not be visible enough to lip read.
9. Be mindful. Always offer to check that the person is following the conversation. It can be isolating if you are the only D/deaf person in your team. Try and remember this when you are communicating with your colleague.
10. Keep trying if a D/deaf person did not hear what you were saying the first time or asks you to repeat. When someone says 'oh, don't worry. It doesn't matter' it feels like they mean 'you don't matter'. It limits a person's ability to progress at work. It hurts. It would hurt you if someone did that to you. So why not try rephrasing what you are trying to communicate?

Do you have questions? Would you like additional guidance on inclusivity and/or the NHS Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)? Contact Cavita Chapman, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Health Education England. Version 1, April 2020.