



IMPROVE YOUR SERVICE TO CUSTOMERS WHO ARE DEAF OR HAVE HEARING LOSS

What is hearing loss?

Hearing loss affects 18 million people in the UK. Hearing loss and deafness happen when sound signals don't reach the brain. This is caused by a problem in the hearing system.

There are two main types of hearing loss. It's possible to have both types, and this is known as mixed hearing loss.

Sensorineural hearing loss

This is caused by damage to the hair cells inside the inner ear, or damage to the hearing nerve, or both.

It makes it more difficult to hear quiet sounds and reduces the quality of sound that you can hear.

Conductive hearing loss

This happens when a problem with the ear, such as ear wax or an ear infection, stops sound from passing through to the cochlea (the hearing organ).

Sounds will become quieter and may sound muffled. It can be temporary or permanent, depending on the cause.

What can you do to make your business more accessible?

There are many easy things you can do to make people with hearing loss welcome, for example:

Room/space design

Loud environments can make it much harder for people with hearing loss to hear what's being said to them.

You can help reduce noise by:

- keeping background music at low levels
- having carpets rather than hard flooring
- using wall panels
- using baffle boards
- having soft furnishings.

Setting up designated quiet spaces can also improve people's experience of using your service.

Some people with hearing loss rely on lip reading to communicate and need to be able to see people's faces. You can help by making sure rooms are well lit and avoiding glare on any transparent screens.

You can increase accessibility for hearing aid users by installing hearing loops.

Make sure your information is accessible

Deaf people may not be able to clearly hear audio instructions over loudspeakers.

You can make information more accessible by providing it in plain English on visible screens or displays.

Providing information in British Sign Language (BSL) improves accessibility for BSL users, either through videos on screens or digital resources.

Make sure your emergency measures are accessible for deaf people by having a clear and visible evacuation plan.

Make sure fire marshals are deaf aware and install accessible smoke alarm systems.

Deaf awareness

You can increase your staff's confidence in communicating with deaf people and people with hearing loss by giving them deaf awareness training. This will also help them understand the barriers that deaf people face.

You can give your staff basic BSL training sessions to help them communicate with people who use BSL as their first or preferred language.

Contact methods

It is important to have many contact methods so people can contact you about your service.

Text-based options, including email, instant messaging, or a video relay service like [Relay UK](#), are more accessible for people with hearing loss.

Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users may prefer to contact you in BSL through video relay services (VRS) or video remote interpreting (VRI).

Some tips to improve your communication

If you're communicating with a deaf person, there are some simple things that you can do to make things easier for both parties. Here are some simple deaf awareness tips from [Deaf Action](#) to help improve communication.

Use gestures - Use simple gestures to communicate where possible. Use whatever is around you, point or even demonstrate. Pointing isn't rude in deaf culture.

Maintain eye contact - Try not to look away, cover your mouth or face the deaf person when you're talking to them.

Technology - Use your mobile phone to help you. Apps like Make It Big will help when typing out messages, then you can still stand 2 metres away. Or try use speech-to-text software such as Google Live Transcribe.

Write it down - Use old fashioned writing to communicate.

Be patient - Take your time, don't give up. Don't shout, it won't help, and you might look angry.

Reduce background noise - Be mindful of background noise if the person is trying to hear you. Masks can muffle so do everything possible to speak in a quiet environment.

Getting attention - To get a deaf person's attention, try lightly tapping their shoulder, waving, knocking on a table or thumping the floor.

Learn British Sign Language - Take advantage of free online British Sign Language courses to learn some basic phrases which could be used in everyday conversation.

The information in this guide comes from RNID and Deaf Action. They have more information and advice on how you can help people who are Deaf or have hearing loss.

RNID - <https://rnid.org.uk/>

Deaf Action - <https://deafaction.org/>