

# Basic Sensory Impairment Awareness

## Deafness

Visual Impairment

Communication Tactics

Appropriate Terminology

Technology

Deafblind

Statistics



Created for ...



Education  
for  
Scotland

[www.nes.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk)

... by



commtacs

training + development

[www.commtacs.co.uk](http://www.commtacs.co.uk)

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## **i. Background**

### **Basic Sensory Impairment Training for NHSScotland Frontline Staff**

In 2009 NHS Education for Scotland commissioned Commtacs Training and Development to develop and deliver basic sensory impairment awareness training to reception, administrative and frontline staff across the NHS in Scotland.

#### **The main tasks were:**

- improve understanding and raise awareness of issues relating to visual impairment with solutions to enable people to manage their daily lives and remain independent*
- provide introductory-level knowledge and understanding about deafness and introduce basic skills that can be used to assist communication between deaf and hearing people.*
- provide introductory-level knowledge and understanding about deafblindness and introduce basic skills that can be used to assist communication between deafblind and hearing people*

In 2009/10 and 2010/11 over 500 receptionists, administrative and frontline staff across NHSScotland took part in training sessions delivered in each Board area. The training was very successful and places were oversubscribed indicating a continuing need for this training. In order to meet this need and sustain the existing training, the training materials have been adapted to produce this stand alone web based resource which staff can work through at their own pace. In addition, it also provides a back up resource for participants of the original training courses.

Training was delivered on behalf of NES by COMMTACS training & development ([www.commtacs.co.uk](http://www.commtacs.co.uk)).

# 1. What is Sensory Impairment?

What does it mean

Causes

Recognising sensory impairment

# 1. What is sensory impairment?

## Sensory impairment or sensory loss - what does it mean?

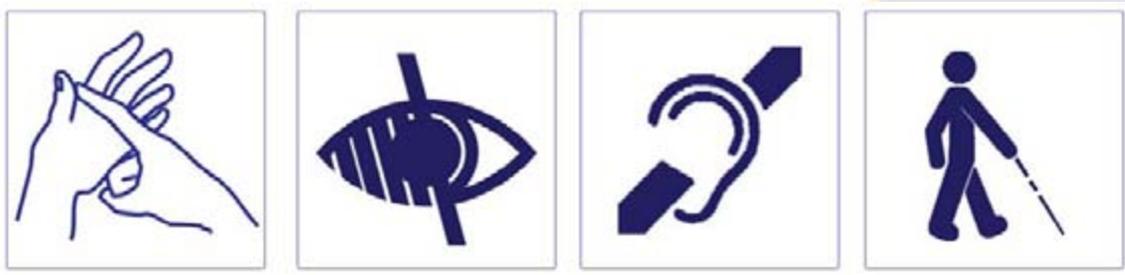
'Sensory impairment' or 'sensory loss' are umbrella terms used to describe loss of the distance senses i.e. sight and hearing.

You will find that the term 'sensory impairment' is commonly used by professionals rather than 'sensory impaired' individuals themselves who may be more likely to use the terms below.

There are three very distinct groups within sensory impairment:

- **visually impaired people**
- **deaf people**
- **deafblind people**

People with a sensory impairment will have experienced life with their individual impairment in a completely different way to others who may be classed as belonging to the same group – no two people will be exactly the same and services should not be delivered as if they were.



## Causes of sensory impairment

The largest cause of sensory impairment is the ageing process with over 65s more likely to experience some level of sensory loss. The following is a list of some common causes, of course, this list is not comprehensive ...

### Blindness/partial sight

- Ageing process, e.g. age-related macular degeneration
- Disease, e.g. diabetes
- Infection, e.g. meningitis
- Genetics e.g. retinitis pigmentosa (RP)
- Injury or physical trauma
- Cataract
- Glaucoma

### Deafness

- Ageing process
- Infection, e.g. meningitis, mumps, measles
- Disease, e.g. Ménière's disease
- Physical trauma
- Exposure to loud noise
- Genetics

### Deafblindness

- Ageing process
- Maternal infection, e.g. rubella
- Genetics, e.g. Usher Syndrome
- Other congenital causes, e.g. premature birth
- Combination of causes of deafness and blindness

**Remember - the largest cause of visual, hearing and dual sensory loss is the ageing process**

## Recognising sensory impairment

At times it may be obvious that a person is either deaf, blind or deafblind, however, many people have developed coping strategies which may unintentionally conceal their impairment.

Indications that an impairment may be present could include one or a combination of the following ...

### Loss of hearing

- Wear a hearing aid
- Use sign language
- Fail to react to voices behind him/her
- Have difficulties joining in a group
- Turn up the volume on the TV/radio
- Fail to respond to a doorbell, etc
- Lean forward and look intently into the speaker's face
- Give inappropriate responses
- Ask for repetition of what was said

### Loss of sight

- Wear dark glasses
- Use a white cane
- Use a guide dog
- Fail to react to visual clues/motions
- Bump into people/objects or trip over items on the ground
- Move around tentatively, perhaps walking close to walls
- Fail to see documents, cups, objects placed near them
- Have to hold something very close to read it
- Not look directly at you

### Loss of both sight and hearing

- Display any of the above ... plus
- Use a red and white cane
- Find it difficult to 'hear' when the light is dim

## 2. Visual Impairment

What does it mean?

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## 2. Visual impairment

### What does it mean?

The term 'visual impairment' is used to refer to anyone who is blind or partially sighted.

#### Blind – what does it mean?

The current definition of blindness which is 60 years old states that the person can be registered blind when they are:

“substantially and permanently handicapped by defective vision, caused by congenital defect or illness or injury” (National Assistance Act, section 29, 1948)

#### Partially sighted – what does it mean?

People can also be registered as Partially Sighted.

People who are registered partially sighted have some useful vision and are sometimes referred to as having 'low vision'.

The **majority** of blind and partially sighted people have a little or some useful vision. Depending on the visual impairment individuals will see things very differently.

#### Some common conditions:

Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

Cataract

Glaucoma

Diabetic Retinopathy

Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) - Tunnel vision



## Statistics - visually impaired people

How many people in Scotland are blind or partially sighted?

The Scottish Executive Statistics Release –  
Registered Blind and Partially Sighted Persons (2007) states:

<b>Number of people registered blind:</b>	<b>22,561</b>
<b>Number of people registered partially sighted:</b>	<b>15,435</b>

These figures combined equate to almost **7 people in every 1,000** will be visually impaired.

Note: these numbers are likely to be an **under-estimate** due to the voluntary nature of registration.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) state that around 2 million people in the UK have a significant sight loss. Given that Scotland makes up roughly 10% of the UK population, this could equate to over 200,000 people in Scotland having a sight loss to some extent.

**Of those people with a visual impairment, approximately 85% are aged over 65. (RNIB, 2006)**



Think how you may have to change the way you deliver services or the layout of your workplace - taking into consideration the potential number of visually impaired people that use your services.

## Communication and access difficulties

Here we highlight **some** problems experienced by blind/partially sighted people with communication and/or accessing information.

- Not being able to access printed material
- Difficulty in accessing the Internet / electronic devices
- Difficulty in getting to destinations and around the built environment
- Accessing unfamiliar buildings and environments
- Lack of awareness of others as to how to help

### What can you do?

Taking **'positive'** action is always better than trying to 'repair' communication breakdowns.

### ***Maximising communication for blind/partially sighted people***

- Always identify yourself even in known surroundings
- Always use names to identify people - especially in a group situation
- Keep the visually impaired person informed of people moving around and/or leaving the room/table etc.
- Don't be concerned about using phrases such as "did you see Alice yesterday?"
- Do not use non-verbal communication e.g. pointing in the direction of something, shrugging shoulders, pulling faces
- Provide information in alternative formats:  
CD, email, extra large print, audio tapes, electronic formats  
braille, moon, large print etc

### ***You may also need to:***

- Allow extra time
- Prepare an appropriate room
- Arrange for the alternative formats to be provided
- Take time to get the environment right
- Look at providing the equivalent of a ramp for wheelchair users

***Small change ...  
... big difference***

### **3. Deaf / Deafness**

What does it mean?

Statistics

Maximising communication and  
access

Hearing aids - benefits and limitations

### 3. Deaf/deafness

#### What does it mean?

There is no formal definition of deafness. It could be described using the medical model or terms that focus on the individual.

Terms used to describe **when** a person became deaf:  
acquired hearing loss or born deaf (post-natal / pre-natal)

People may describe **themselves** or be described as:

- Hard of hearing
- Deafened/profoundly deaf
- Sign language users
- Partially deaf
- Partially hearing
- Hearing impaired

Terms that also describe the **level** of hearing loss may be used  
(along with measurement in decibel loss - dB)

Mild	20 – 40 decibels
Moderate	41 – 70 decibels
Severe	71 – 95 decibels
Profound	95+ decibels

'Normal' conversation at a distance of 1 metre is between 50-60dB

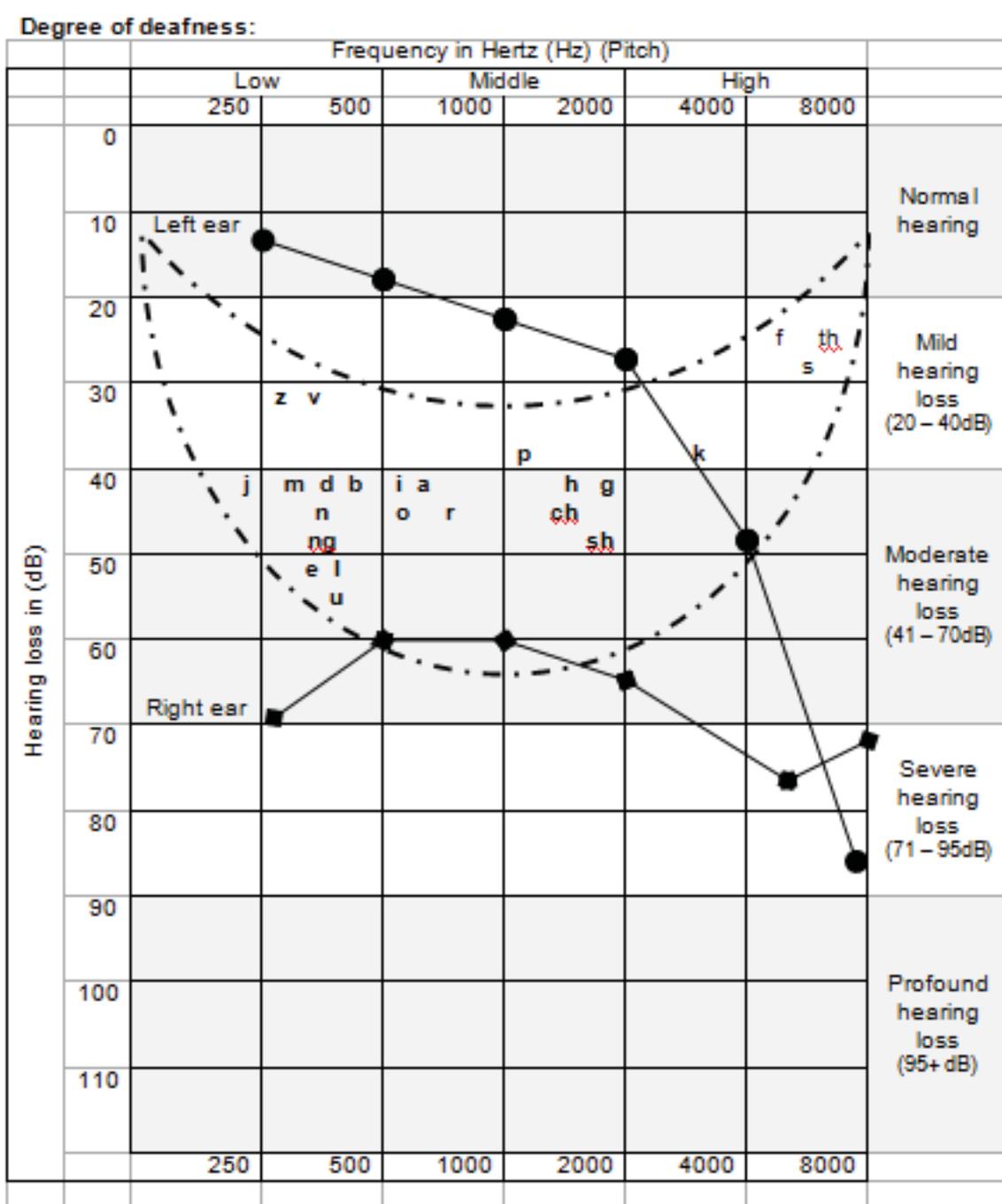
#### Some common conditions:

- Age related deafness
- Cochlea Ostosclerosis
- Drugs (ototoxic deafness)
- Maternal Rubella
- Meningitis
- Measles
- Noise Induced deafness
- Presbycusis

## What we hear?

Deafness is not only about volume. Frequencies of sound have to be considered as well. It is more common for people to have a little useful hearing, particularly with the help of appropriately issued hearing aids.

The following chart highlights what a person hears (or not hears) plotted on an audiogram. Most deaf people will have a bi-lateral hearing loss which is similar in both ears. This chart shows a person who hears differently from ear to ear. In the most basic terms, this person will not hear clearly the speech sounds above each line at the given frequencies.



## Statistics

### How many people in Scotland are deaf?

As there is no central register of deafness, it is difficult to say accurately how many deaf people there are in Scotland, however a number of estimates exist:

Action on Hearing Loss (The Royal National Institute for Deaf People - RNID) estimates that **1 in 6** people in the UK have a hearing loss.

The Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD) estimate that up to 1 in 5 of the Scottish population have a hearing loss may be more realistic, considering the ageing population and the heavy industrial past.

Based on the 1 in 6 ratio - The total number of people of all ages with deafness ranging from mild to profound in Scotland would be in excess of **800,000**.

From this figure - there would be over:

**760,000** hard of hearing people

**10,600** deafened people  
(those who become profoundly deaf either suddenly or progressively)

**5,300** Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users

The incidence of deafness increases sharply with age, so the older you are the more likely you are to have a hearing loss.

Estimated 75% of over 70s will have a hearing loss

## Communication and access difficulties

Here we highlight some problems experienced by deaf people with communication and/or accessing information.

- Not being able to access spoken material
- English as a second language
- Difficulties with lipreading
- Difficulty in accessing BSL interpreters or other appropriate communication professional
- Difficulty in accessing loop systems
- Lack of awareness of others as to how to help

### What can you do?

Taking 'positive' action is always better than trying to 'repair' communication breakdowns.

### *Maximising communication for deaf people*

- Ask if they want to use a loop system
- Try to establish the person's preferred communication method
- If necessary book BSL interpreters, lipspeaker, notetaker etc well in advance
- Face the person
- Use clear speech, normal lip pattern, don't shout
- Use finger spelling
- Speak at ear level
- Repeat, rephrase
- Write things down
- Ensure there is no echo - room with soft furnishings
- Quiet situation

### *You may also need to:*

- Allow extra time
- Prepare an appropriate room
- Book the necessary communication support
- Take time to get the environment right
- Look at providing the equivalent of a ramp for wheelchair users

## Hearing aids - benefits and limitations

Hearing aids come in many shapes and sizes (and colours!). The most common being the 'behind-the-ear aid'. Others include body worn aids which can be kept in a shirt/jacket pocket, an in-the-ear aid which fits snugly into the outer part of the ear canal (becoming more common), hearing aids attached to spectacles, radio aids etc.

Virtually all hearing aids (especially behind-the-ear aids) have 3 switches: O - off, M - microphone (on) and T – telecoil (loop). Some just have a button for the Loop option.

The T switch allows the user to use an Inductive Loop System, where only the sound from an external microphone is received by the hearing aid via magnetic signals transmitted through a wired 'loop' which can surround a table, room, theatre etc., thus, cutting out background noise etc.

### Hearing Aids:

- enable **some** deaf people to understand speech more easily - either on its own or with a Loop system
- are a miniature **amplifying** system
- do **not restore** 'normal' hearing
- benefits of hearing aids **depend** on the individual (i.e. type, degree of deafness)
- make **all** sounds louder
- take **time** to get used to
- are **not** suitable for all people
- some people have to **re-learn** sounds
- profoundly deaf people may derive **little** or **no** benefit from hearing aids

Some people may find hearing aids unsightly and/or the 'dawning' of old-age.

Just because a person is wearing a hearing aid - please do not assume they can hear clearly.

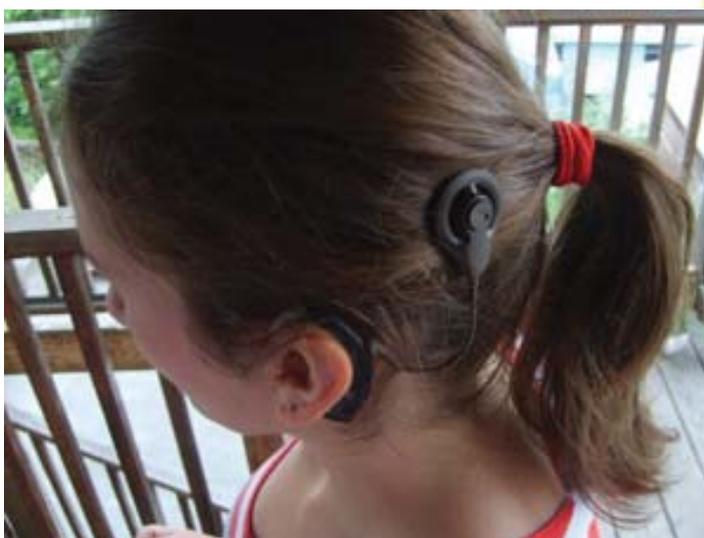


## Cochlear Implants

Technology is advancing and there are many developments in the area of 'aids to hearing' including cochlear implants, bone anchored hearing aids and middle ear implants.

A popular misconception is that an implant is a cure for deafness, this is not the case. A Cochlear Implant is a ***surgically implanted device*** which stimulates the nerve of hearing and is usually only offered to people who do not derive any benefit from conventional hearing aids.

Implants do not restore or 'give the gift of hearing', however, they do offer the chance to hear everyday sounds and sounds of speech. Sounds heard have to be learnt.



## 4. Deafblind / Dual Sensory Loss

What does it mean?

Statistics

Maximising communication and access

## 4. Deafblind/Dual sensory loss

### What does it mean?

The generally accepted definition of deafblindness across Europe is:

*'Persons are regarded as deafblind if they have a severe degree of combined visual and auditory impairment, resulting in problems with communication, information and mobility'.*

*"Breaking Through" Report, 1988*

The terms **dual sensory loss**, **dual sensory impairment** and **deafblind** are used interchangeably.

There are two recognisably very distinct groups within deafblindness:

#### ***Congenitally deafblind***

having been born with a dual sensory impairment or having developed it in early childhood.

#### ***Acquired deafblindness***

having been born with vision and/or hearing and having lost one or both some time after childhood, normally in later life.

Person who is **born deaf** and later lose their sight

Person who is **born blind** and later lose their hearing

Person who **loses both** sight and hearing in later life

This group includes those who have Usher Syndrome. Usher Syndrome is an inherited condition which results in hearing loss and a progressive loss of vision from Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). The hearing loss is congenital, and ranges from moderate to profound. RP can occur without hearing loss.

#### ***Remember***

***people may describe themselves differently, for example:***

Deaf person with a visual impairment

Dual sensory impaired

Hard of hearing with a sight loss

Blind with hearing impairment

Etc...

## Statistics

### *How many people in Scotland are deafblind?*

There is no registration for deafblindness, therefore it is impossible to say exactly how many people in Scotland are deafblind.

Deafblind Scotland estimates there are 5,000 deafblind people in Scotland. Because of the effects of the ageing process, a large proportion of the numbers given are people over 65.

The number of people (mainly older people) in Scotland who experience some level of dual sensory loss: 25,000



Image from Deafblind Scotland



## Communication and access difficulties

Here we highlight some problems experienced by deafblind people with communication and/or accessing information.

**All** of the above points raised under blind, partially sighted and deaf people **plus:**

- Not having access to guide/communicator service or communication support
- Lack of awareness of the possibility of dual sensory loss being present
- Lack of awareness of others as to how to help

### What can you do?

Taking 'positive' action is always better than trying to 'repair' communication breakdowns.

### Maximising communication for deafblind people

Follow all the guidelines for blind and deaf people and then additionally:

- Good lighting is essential
- Plain background
- Light on the person speaking and coming from behind the deafblind person
- Distance and positioning is important, check their preferred distance.
- Use a whiteboard, or paper with black felt tip pen
- Provide a guide/communicator to help deafblind person prepare for an appointment

### You may also need to:

- Allow extra time
- Prepare an appropriate room
- Book the necessary communication support
- Arrange for the alternative formats to be provided
- Take time to get the environment right
- Look at providing the equivalent of a ramp for wheelchair users

**Remember** - what works for one deafblind person may not work for another - always check with the person.

## 5. Practical Communication

Fingerspelling

Points for good communication

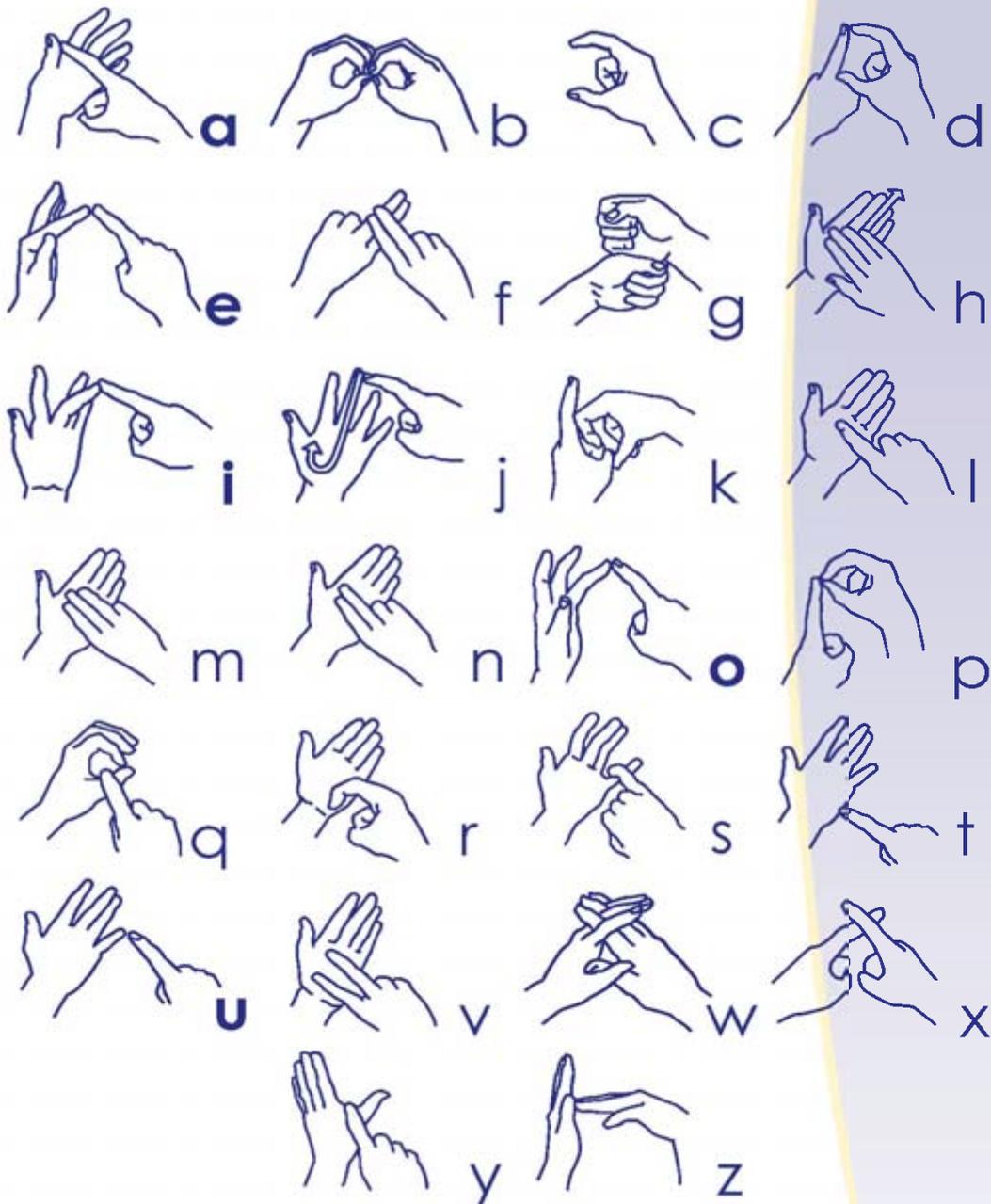
Guiding awareness

Communication support services

## Practical communication

### Two-handed fingerspelling

In general deaf people who use sign language use two-handed fingerspelling. Some hard of hearing/deafened people may use fingerspelling to initialise similar looking/sounding words (for example; 'c' for ceiling and 's' for selling)



[www.commtacs.co.uk](http://www.commtacs.co.uk)

## Deafblind manual

Some deafblind people (including deaf people who become blind) rely on a 'tactile' form of the alphabet. Deafblind manual is based on the two-handed fingerspelling as above, but with the obvious difference of the letters being spelled onto the hands of the deafblind person.

Some of the letters are produced slightly different from the two-handed version (for example; 'p' is the pinching of the recipient's index finger so it is not confused with 'e').



## Block alphabet

Some deafblind people may not have learned either two-handed or deafblind manual and prefer to receive letters 'drawn' on the palm of the hand. These shapes resemble capital letters of the written alphabet. It is important to note that each letter has a number of strokes to 'draw' out the letter shape (for example the letter 'A' has 2-strokes and not three as you may expect - if it had, it may be confusable with 'H').

Using your forefinger trace BLOCK CAPITAL letters on the palm of the deaf-blind person's hand - each letter on top of the last.

Quick signs: Two taps on the palm for 'Yes' Rubbing out movement accros the palm for 'No' or for erasing an error.



## Points for good communication

- ✓ Keep your face in good light and face the person who's deaf. A light source will cast a shadow on your face making lip-reading difficult
- ✓ Keep your face clear at all times. Hands, pens and untrimmed beards & moustaches also make lip-reading difficult. Masks or visors may hinder clear communication
- ✓ Speak clearly. Do not exaggerate your mouth movements and do not shout, this distorts your lip-patterns
- ✓ Cut out as much background noise as possible, e.g. close windows, doors, turn off radios etc. Hearing aids pick up and amplify all sounds. Remember, 'visual noise' has to be considered as well!
- ✓ Use the most common form of words and do not change from one topic of conversation to another as this confuses a lip-reader
- ✓ If you are not understood, try re-phrasing what you said or write it down
- ✓ If another person joins the conversation, indicate to the deaf person who is now speaking by a hand gesture or a nod in the direction of the new speaker
- ✓ It may also be useful to use some gestures when explaining things. Remember, gestures and normal facial expressions form part of good communication
- ✓ Be aware that laminated notices/posters may be affected by glare from lighting
- ✓ Printed material may need to be changed – type size, colour of paper
- ✓ Contrasting colours to indicate furniture such as low tables, doorways etc assist visually impaired people in getting around
- ✓ Remove any obstacles which may be a risk – waste/recycling bins for example
- ✓ **Ask the person!**

## Guiding awareness

There is no one correct way to guide a deafblind person. Each deafblind person experiences deafblindness in their own unique way, and this affects their mobility and guiding needs

Introduce yourself and ask the person if she/he needs assistance

You must always be just in front, the blind / deafblind person will follow

Offer them your elbow then keep your elbow at the side of your body - this will automatically mean you are in front

Don't look at their feet, look ahead

Take their hand and gently put it on the chair/door/cup

Never push them backwards into a chair, take their hand and gently put it on the back of the chair

A person born with a visual impairment may have undergone mobility training and be confident being guided

A person with acquired blindness/deafblindness may require different techniques (e.g. firmer hold)



## Communication services

### 1 - British Sign Language/English Interpreter

#### ***What do they do?***

Interprets from one language to the other (usually simultaneously)  
e.g. English to British Sign Language (BSL) & BSL to English

#### ***Who would use them?***

BSL users  
Born or became deaf in early childhood  
Sign language may be their main means to communication

### 2 - Electronic Notetaker / Speech to Text Reporter

#### ***What do they do?***

Writes or types (conventional or palantype keyboard) almost verbatim.  
Palantype operator – 200 wpm

#### ***Who would use them?***

Deafened or hard of hearing people  
Became deaf after acquiring spoken language - spoken/written may be their main means to communication

### 3 - Lip Speaker

#### ***What do they do?***

Repeats what is being said without voice (only lip movements), almost verbatim and with appropriate facial expressions and gestures

#### ***Who would use them?***

Hard of hearing people  
Born or became deaf (partially/severe) - spoken/written may be their main means to communication

### 4 - Communicator Guide with Deafblind People

#### ***What do they do?***

The tasks they carry out will vary, depending on the individual deafblind person, their level of residual hearing and vision and the communication and access skills they have acquired.

#### ***Who would use them?***

Deafblind people with varying degrees of visual and hearing impairments (dual sensory loss).

## 6. Useful contacts

## 6. Useful contacts

### **Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD)**

Central Chambers Suite 62  
93 Hope Street  
Glasgow G2 6LD

Tel: 0141 248 2474  
Text: 0141 248 2477 and 1854  
Fax: 0141 248 2479

[www.scod.org.uk](http://www.scod.org.uk)

### **Royal National Institute for Deaf People**

Empire House  
131 West Nile Street,  
Glasgow  
G1 2RX

0141 341 5330

[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

### **Royal National Institute for Blind People**

12-14 Hillside Crescent  
Edinburgh  
EH7 5EA  
Telephone 0131 652 3140  
Fax 0131 652 3199

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

### **Guide Dogs**

24D Milton Road East  
Edinburgh  
EH14 2NJ

Telephone: 0141 248 5554  
Fax: 0141 248 5565

[www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk)

### **Deafblind Scotland**

21 Alexandra Avenue  
Lenzie  
East Dunbartonshire  
G66 5BG

Tel: 0141 777 6111  
Fax: 0141 775 3311

[www.deafblindscotland.org.uk](http://www.deafblindscotland.org.uk)

### **Sense Scotland**

43 Middlesex Street  
Kinning Park  
Glasgow G41 1EE

Tel: 0141 429 0294  
Fax: 0141 429 0295  
Text: 0141 418 7170

[www.sensescotland.org.uk](http://www.sensescotland.org.uk)

### **Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI)**

Suite 404 – 408  
Baltic Chambers  
50 Wellington Street  
Glasgow G2 6HJ

Tel: 0141 248 8159  
Fax: 0141 221 1693

[www.sasli.org.uk](http://www.sasli.org.uk)

### **British Deaf Association**

1st Floor, Central Chambers  
Suite 58  
93 Hope Street  
Glasgow, G2 6LD

Tel: 0141 248 5554  
Fax: 0141 248 5565

[www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk)

NHS Education for Scotland  
4th floor Thistle House  
91 Haymarket Terrace  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5HD

tel: 0131 313 8000  
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[www.nes.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk)

