



Deaf Awareness guide

Terminology

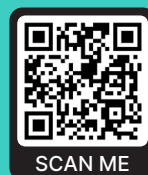
D/deaf	Used to identify people with all degrees of deafness
Hard-of-hearing	Mild to severe hearing loss. Usually identify to describe people who have lost hearing gradually
Deafened	Used to identify people who become severely or profoundly Deaf after learning to speak
Deafblind	Used to identify people who have limited vision and hearing or who are fully Deaf and Blind

Interesting facts

- One of the earliest written references to a sign language is from the fifth century B.C., in Plato's Cratylus, where Socrates made mention of moving hands to communicate
- The earliest record of British Sign Language in the UK was in 1576, when a Deaf couple had a church wedding conducted in sign language
- There are ten million Deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the UK (about 1 in 6 of the UK population as a whole)
- 150,000 people use British Sign Language; 24,000 people identify as Deafblind; 400,000 people rely on lip-reading
- BSL is the first language for the majority of Deaf people in the UK, not English

What is BSL?*

British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of over 87,000 Deaf people in the UK for whom English may be a second or third language. (A total of 151,000 individuals in the UK



can use BSL. This figure does not include professional BSL users, interpreters, translators, etc unless they use BSL at home).

Sign languages are fully functional and expressive languages; at the same time they differ profoundly from spoken languages. BSL is a visual-gestural language with a distinctive grammar using handshapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to convey meaning.

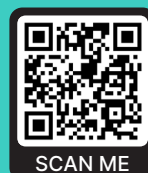
The earliest recorded instance of gestural communication among Deaf people occurs in the Talmud. In his book, "Britain's Deaf Heritage", Peter Jackson speculates that the presence of sign languages among Australian aborigines, Kalahari Bush People, and North American Plains Indians suggests that the use of sign language goes back to prehistoric times. BSL has been in use for hundreds of years. The first printed account in the UK of its usage was recorded in John Bulwer's "Chirologia – The National language of the Hand" in 1644. Before that, in 1595 Richard Carew first recorded an observation of Sign Language in use between two Deaf people, Edward Bone and John Kempe, in his Survey of Cornwall. Earlier still, in the Parish book of St Martin's, Leicester, an account can be found of a wedding conducted partly in Sign Language on 5 February 1576. References to Sign Language are also found in the Bible and in Greek and Roman writings.

Is Sign Language universal?*

Contrary to popular belief, Sign Language is not international. Sign languages evolve wherever there are Deaf people, and they show all the variation you would expect from different spoken languages.

Sign languages do not derive from the spoken language of a country. Thus, although in Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States the main spoken language is English, all three have entirely separate sign languages. As with spoken languages, a sign language can evolve from a parent sign language and therefore show affinities. For instance, due to historical and political links, Australian Sign Language and modern BSL share a common ancestor, and there are similarities between the two. American Sign Language (ASL) bears a resemblance to French Sign Language (LSF) because Laurent Clerc introduced the "methodical sign system" developed by the Abbe de l'Epee in eighteenth century France into American Deaf education. There are also regional dialects and "accents" which are present in every language.

There is a collection of internationally accepted signs – International Sign (IS) – which Deaf people sometimes use in the course of international meetings.



In 1988 the European Parliament passed a Resolution on Sign Languages, proposing that every member country recognise its own national Sign Language as the official language of Deaf people in that country. The Deaf community, through the British Deaf Association and other Deaf organisations and groups, is still campaigning for a legal status for BSL in the UK, though the UK Government recognised BSL as a language of its own rights on 18th March 2003.

What is the medical model of disability?

This concept views a Deaf or disabled person as dependent and needing to be “fixed” or “cured” so they are the same as everyone else. This view directly correlates to the systematic exclusion of disabled people from society.

What is the social model of disability?

A positive and inclusive approach to disability that recognises that both the individual and society are responsible for barriers and seeks to address those to achieve equality for all.

How to communicate with a Deaf person?

Ask about the Deaf person's preferred method of communication; every person has different preferences. Deaf people may have different needs for communication, services, employment, education, and information. One solution will not do for everyone.

What is Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI)?

These are fully qualified interpreters, having done all the necessary training to work in most domains: police, medical, work, conferences etc. Identifiable by their yellow ID card.

What is Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI)?

Trainees are usually working towards becoming qualified and can work in some areas. Identifiable by their purple ID card.

Why is using a registered interpreter important?

When you use a registered interpreter, you know they: are appropriately trained and qualified; have passed enhanced DBS (previously CRB) checks; are insured (PII); are subject to an independent complaints' procedure; work to a professional code of conduct.

*Source: British Deaf Association

