

Deaf culture

Minnesota Department of Human Services

<https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/seniors/services/deaf-hard-of-hearing/resources/deaf-culture.jsp>

All cultures, including Deaf culture have four components: language, behavioral norms, values and traditions. For Deaf culture, vision plays a significant role in each of the four components. People who are Deaf rely strongly on their vision to communicate and gather information.

Language

American Sign Language (ASL) is:

- The preferred language of the Deaf community
- A visual gestural language
- A language with its own syntax and grammatical structure

American Sign Language is not:

- Signs in English word order
- An auditory or written language
- A universal language

Historically, ASL has been passed from one generation to the next in schools. Even when ASL was not allowed in the classroom, Deaf staff and peers discreetly used their cherished language to communicate. ASL has also been preserved through church and other social gatherings.

Behavioral Norms

Making eye contact:

- Essential for effective communication
- Important because people who are Deaf read the nuances of facial expressions and body language for additional information

Attention getting:

- Hand waving is most common
- Tapping the shoulder or arm is acceptable
- Flickering lights on and off is also common
- Tapping on a table or stomping foot on a floor is done occasionally
- Using a third person to relay attention is sometimes used in a crowded room

Meeting others within the Deaf community:

- Greetings often include hugs instead of handshakes
- Conversations tend to include elaboration about lives and daily occurrences
- Conversations tend to be open and direct
- There is an interest in other people's connection with the Deaf community

Values

The following are highly valued and vital aspects of everyday living by the Deaf community. Notice the value comparisons between people who are Deaf and people who can hear.

People who are Deaf value

ASL

Eyes (rely on vision)

Hands/signs

Videophone (VP); Relay Service; TTY

Visual/vibrating alerting systems

Video mail

Interpreters

Captioning

Deaf clubs, Deaf civic and social organizations

People who can hear value

Spoken language

Ears (rely on sound)

Mouth/speech

Telephone

Sound alerting system

Voice mail

Speakers

Dialogue

Civic and social organizations

Traditions

The traditions of the Deaf community are a reflection of their cultural values. It is understandable that many of their traditions are based on the face-to-face gathering of people who are Deaf, because communication—the lifeblood of any culture—only happens visually in this community.

The traditions materialize in the strong family-like ties and lifelong camaraderie that develops between individuals. Some examples include their strong devotion to

community Deaf club/events, Deaf alumni events, senior citizen gatherings, religious activities, conferences, and sporting events at the local, regional and national level. These provide a social gathering opportunity, a mechanism for participation in the political and economic decision-making trends affecting Deaf citizens and a means for grooming new leaders to carry on Deaf community traditions. Events are frequently filled with entertainment such as Deaf folklore, arts, history, ASL poetry, songs and joke-telling.