

## COMMUNICATION SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH SENSORY NEEDS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Hertfordshire Sensory Services support children and adults with sensory needs.

During the COVID-19 situation, we are here to support staff on the front line. If you have a patient or carer with a sensory need, please use the below tips to provide the best care and support possible.

**We strongly encourage you to contact us for information and advice. We also accept referrals and will always promote joint-working. Contact us Monday-Friday 9-5pm:**

**Duty Worker: 01442 454832 (Comnet 84832) (Sensory Admin on 01442 454829 (Comnet 83829)**

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**\*\*\* [Always talk to the person directly, rather than their companion](#) \*\*\***

### Hard of Hearing (also use Deaf tips below if applicable)

- Make yourself clear to be understood so that they can lip-read. Keep sentences short.
- Don't raise your voice or shout at the person.
- Encourage them to wear their hearing aids. Ask if they have any equipment at home, they can use i.e. Echo Minitch (personal listener for conversations).
- Try **using smartphone apps to communicate i.e. BIG (Apple) or Large Text (Android)**
- **Updated 1/5/2020 – new [CARDMEDIC](#)** is a free digital communication tool to improve transfer of vital information through the PPE barrier to unwell and critically ill patients in the COVID-19 pandemic. An A-Z compendium of topics designed in a simple succinct flashcard style, it also provides training for healthcare professionals and volunteers working outside their usual realms of practice. Please see [Guardian article](#) about the idea behind CARDMEDIC.

### Deaf (British Sign Language - BSL user)

- Ask if they can lip-read you. If you are wearing a mask, stand away 2 metres, remove your mask and communicate what you need to say. Alternatively use a clear mask so your mouth can be seen.
- If lip-reading is not possible, then **try using smartphone apps i.e. BIG (Apple) or Large Text (Android) to communicate by large print text.** Failing that, always have pen and paper handy – **keep words simple.** **Updated 1/5/2020 – try new [CARDMEDIC](#)** (as explained above).
- **Updated 16/4/2020 - NEW BSL Health Access Services** was launched with online 24/7 BSL Interpreting Services for deaf people in health setting (England & Wales). On their website, there are two option – one for BSL user and one for Health providers (see point below).

**For Health Providers**, their advice is: if you are a hearing person/staff who need help to communicate with a Deaf person in a 'Health Care' scenario in sign language you can call **03333 444 921** and the online interpreter will communicate to the Deaf person for you. All you need is a phone. You don't need to install any software, just ring the above number. All interpreters are qualified and NRCPD registered and comply with confidentiality (no calls are recorded) and the Service is **FREE at the point of use by Deaf people or anyone wanting to communicate in sign language.** *"It can be used for any NHS funded service, so if a social care provider is supporting a Deaf resident around a health issue (GP, pharmacist, hospital etc) then YES they can use it. We know that a lot of older Deaf people are isolated in mainstream care homes. And YES to community and primary care health settings."* We hope that the government will fund this service in the future but, in the meantime, the Deaf health charity, SignHealth is paying for it.

- Inform them they can follow Coronavirus information via BSL interpreted live briefings from BBC News (around 4-5pm), or Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD)'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/RADRoyalAssociationforDeafpeople/> or on SignHealth's Coronavirus website: <https://signhealth.org.uk/resources/coronavirus/>
- We have Deaf staff who use sign language. If you require urgent assistance with communication, video-call us via **WhatsApp (07812 324532 for staff use in COVID-19 situation only)**. If possible, just send a text with the patient's mobile number (with their consent) so that we can contact them via video-call or text messaging. **Please do not share this mobile number outside this COVID situation.**

### Visually Impaired

- Remember if someone is blind, it doesn't always mean they have no sight at all.
- Inform them when you are entering or leaving the room that the person is in. **Please introduce yourself so they know who you are when entering.**
- Gain the person's attention by speaking first and/or by a gentle touch on the arm.
- Ask if guidance or support is required. Don't automatically take the person's arm.
- Introduce yourself and what you do.
- Be natural and continue to use body language, as well as verbally acknowledging during the conversation (avoid nods and head shakes; and verbalise your actions).
- Be accurately descriptive when explain something.
- In a group conversation, always make it clear who you are and who you are speaking to
- Provide information in an alternative/accessible way – audio, large print or braille (if available).

### DeafBlind

- Please use the above tips and ask the person their preferred communication method(s).
- Please refer to additional info from Hi-Vis on guideline working with deafblind people <http://hi-vis.org/covid-19/> including '**Caring for someone over 70? You need to read their free guides!**' as follow:
  - COVID-19 GUIDE #1: Visiting someone with DSI at their home
  - COVID-19 GUIDE #2: Everyday DSI situations - In this second guide, using a question and answer style, we illustrate some common questions that come up and offer tried and tested practical solutions you can consider.
  - COVID-19 GUIDE #3: Professionals supporting an older person with Dual Sensory Impairment
- If you need advice and information, contact **Hertfordshire Sensory Services** (numbers at top) or call Sense (Deafblind charity) on 0300 330 9250.