

Welcoming a Deaf or Hearing-Impaired Girl into Your Troop

The official definition of deafness is the inability to comprehend verbal language due to an inability to hear. A hearing impairment can affect the ability to hear intensity, pitch, or both. Typically hearing loss above 90 decibels is considered deafness. Hearing loss varies in severity and it's important to remember to treat each girl uniquely to meet her needs.

Remember that if a person is hearing impaired or deaf, they learn and communicate differently. Sometimes, a girl who is hard of hearing or deaf may also have speech difficulties or may not verbally communicate at all. You may need to work with a Sign Language Interpreter during your meetings. Do not assume a deaf person can 'read lips' or even communicate via written instructions. For those who learn Sign Language as their first language, written language is a second language that can be difficult for them to interpret or understand.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with Deafness or Hearing Impairment in your troop:

1. Talk to her and her parents-- she may have one ear that is better than the other. In that case, position her so that whoever is talking is heard with that ear
2. If she has an interpreter, talk to the girl not to the interpreter and verse yourself in appropriate Sign Language Interpreter etiquette
3. Be aware of how other noises can affect her-- this is a good time to teach the other girls what "quiet" really means
4. Supplement with visual instructions as needed for activities
5. Have all girls work with a buddy and double check that everyone understood the directions clearly
6. Discuss clear safety rules- for example, if you are in a museum, she may not hear the fire alarm, develop an emergency gesture (she may already have one)
7. Some girls can wear special hearing aids that interact with a headset or microphone-- the person who is talking should wear the headset/microphone
8. If she has difficulty speaking, be patient-- find out ahead of time how she would prefer to communicate (interpreter, written, visual, etc.)
9. Have fun and learn! If she uses Sign Language, there is no reason why your other girls (and the adults) can't learn some too!
10. Unless the girl and her parent/guardian prefer confidentiality within the troop, have the girl share about her differing abilities and special needs with the troop and allow the other girls to ask questions in a sensitive and caring manner. This will promote better understanding and allow everyone to work together as a troop to ensure that everyone's needs are met
11. Always consult with the parent/guardian beforehand to be sure you're providing for the girl's needs to the best of your ability-- they will know the best methods and strategies to help their child

For more information on Deaf Culture and Etiquette visit Deaf Websites <http://www.deafwebsites.com/deaf-culture/deaf-etiquette.html>

For more general help and information visit The National Association of the Deaf <https://www.nad.org/about-us/>

If you have other questions or concerns you may contact GSEP via email at memberservices@gsep.org or via phone at 215-564-2030

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor's instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSEP volunteers to use while welcoming girls with special needs to their troops and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian's instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel