

Communicating with Hard of Hearing, Deaf, and DeafBlind Individuals - for Law Enforcement

This guide provides officers with essential tips for safe, effective, and lawful communication when interacting with Hard of Hearing, Deaf, and DeafBlind individuals.

Immediate Steps for Officers



When You First Make Contact

- Get visual attention (light wave or gesture, never grabbing unless absolutely necessary).
- Identify yourself and your purpose.
- Maintain eye contact; face the person directly.
- Ensure good lighting and avoid standing in front of bright lights.



Avoid These Missteps

- **Do NOT rely on lip reading** — most Deaf people do not lip-read fluently.
- **Do NOT rely on written notes for complex or legal communication.**
- **Do NOT raise your voice or exaggerate mouth movements.**

How to Communicate Effectively

Preferred Communication Methods

Ask: "What's the best way for you to communicate right now?"

They may choose:

- American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter
- Writing (for simple info only)
- Gestures
- Notes app or texting
- Tactile or Protactile communication (for DeafBlind individuals)



Key Officer Guidance

- Allow extra processing time.
- Keep instructions short and clear.
- Use gestures or visuals when appropriate.

When Written Communication Is NOT Appropriate



Writing is NOT enough when:

- You are issuing rights (Miranda, consent, warnings).
- You are gathering statements or conducting interviews.
- The information is detailed or time-sensitive.
- The person appears confused, distressed, or has limited English proficiency.

Written exchanges may lead to misunderstandings and legal challenges.

When an Interpreter Is Required



You MUST use a qualified interpreter when:

- Communicating rights, charges, or legal consequences.
- Taking statements or interviews.
- Asking detailed questions about events.



An interpreter should NOT be:

- A family member
- A friend
- A bystander
- A child

Communication Tips for High-Stress or Safety Situations

- ✓ **Use clear hand signals combined with simple written keywords.**
- ✓ **Demonstrate actions visually** – e.g., showing where to stand.
- ✓ **For DeafBlind individuals** – offer your hand and allow them to initiate tactile contact.
- ✓ **Maintain calm body language.**
- ✓ **Be patient** – allow extra time for communication without rushing.
- ✓ **Respect preferences** – ask the individual how they prefer to communicate.

ADA Requirements for Law Enforcement



- Officers must provide effective communication as required by the ADA.
- The level of communication support must match the complexity of the situation.
- Simple exchanges may be handled with gestures or brief writing, but complex communication requires a qualified interpreter.
- Delayed or improper communication can lead to escalation, confusion, or civil rights violations.

Request an ASL Interpreter



Email: interpretingservices@vancro.com

Phone: 802-271-0103

Video Phone: 802-271-0104