

Accommodations & Safety for Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing Employees



Employers often have concerns related to hiring people with disabilities, including accommodations and safety. It's important to be prepared to answer questions your industry partner may have when hiring a student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing (HH).

Accommodations

The specific accommodations needed will vary by individual and situation. Below are some examples of common workplace accommodations for deaf/HH people.

Everyday Technology

- **Email, texting, and instant messaging** are quick and convenient forms of communication for all. Deaf/HH and hearing co-workers can use these tools to converse, including when by sitting side-by-side, with laptops, tablets, or phones.
- **Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)** applications for one-on-one-conversations can be very helpful, as well as audio alert apps that can detect loud noises, then vibrate and flash to alert the user.

Telecommunication Services, Devices, and Interpreters

- **Video Relay Service** is a free, federally funded service that enables deaf/HH individuals to communicate via telephone.
- **Captioned Telephone Service** enables deaf/HH individuals to use a telephone or computer to speak others and read captions of what the other party says.
- **Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)** amplify sound directly into the ear. They separate the desired sounds, particularly speech, from background noise.
- **Interpreters** aid in the facilitation of communication and may be needed in settings such as interviews, training, meetings, and performance appraisals. Interpreters must keep all information confidential.

Captioning

Video captioning provides access for deaf/HH people. All videos should be captioned.

- **CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation)** refers to typing and displaying what is being said in real time and is typically used for large meetings, training sessions, and online/virtual webinars.
- **Automatic Captioning** is not recommended for formal meetings or training as they do not typically include multiple speaker identification, technical vocabulary, homonym differentiation, or the ability to clarify information or correct errors.

Visual Alerts

- If using an office space where a deaf/HH person may need to answer the door, consider a **flashing light** to let them know someone is at the door.
- **Personal mirrors** can be installed in a deaf/HH person's workspace so they can see when someone is approaching from behind.

Safety

In a manufacturing or lab environment, standard employee safety will benefit a deaf/HH person. This includes having published procedures, safety training, and indicators such as hazard signage, rearview mirrors, and painted/taped boundary lines. In all workplaces, the following will ensure safety for all, including deaf/HH employees.

Equipment for Safety

- **Strobe lights** or **vibrating alarm signals** notify all employees of emergencies.
- **Vibrating watches** or other equipment alert deaf/HH workers of various situations.
- Use **both visual and auditory warning systems** on machines to notify employees of a malfunction or emergency.
- Use **visual indicators** to show steps in a process and when a process is complete.
- Use **convex mirrors** in blind spot areas so that everyone can avoid collisions.

Partner for Safety

- Use a **buddy system** during emergencies to ensure the safety of all workers.
- Send **emergency alerts** to cell phones and/or dedicated pagers. This can efficiently inform all employees of dangerous situations.
- **Inform** *all* employees that there is a deaf/HH employee onsite.

Additional Resources

- DeafTEC Working Together - <http://workingtogether.deaftec.org>
- NTID Center on Employment - <https://www.rit.edu/ntid/nce/employers>
- Job Accommodation Network - <https://askjan.org/disabilities/Deafness.cfm>
- National Deaf Center - <https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org>



Developed in conjunction with DeafTEC, part of the Rochester Institute of Technology: <https://deaftec.org/>



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