

A Guide for STUDENTS

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This guide offers several strategies that can help you learn and make friends in school.



As a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, you have the right to understand your teachers and classmates. Although learning and making friends through an interpreter can be challenging, it is very important for you to be able to learn and communicate with all of your classmates and teachers.

Students' Rights Regarding Educational Interpreters

You have the right to:

- communicate in your own language and have your interpreter communicate in your language;
- utilize an educational interpreter who is highly qualified;
- utilize an educational interpreter in the classroom, during school meetings and assemblies, and during after-school groups, sports activities, and events;
- be treated with respect and encouraged to become independent like your classmates who can hear;
- opportunities to learn how to work with and schedule interpreters;
- opportunities to learn how to use Internet interpreters;
- be included in discussions concerning interpreting and your interpreter, such as in your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings or teacher meetings (if you are 14 years old or older); and
- have your family know about your interpreter and how the accommodation is working.



It is very important to understand that some types of communication that the interpreter sees or interprets may be reported to the school. For example, in some schools using bad language may be reported. The interpreter may also be required to report something you did outside of school if you talk about it in school. You should talk with your interpreters about when they may or must report your action, or when they may interpret what you say to others even if you do not want them to.

Using Spoken English and a Sign Language Interpreter

Many students can communicate in both sign language and spoken English. If you can speak, you probably know that there are some times when you can understand speech and other times

when you cannot. Sometimes you may want an interpreter, other times you may want to communicate yourself, and still other times you may want the interpreter to help only if you do not understand. It is good to discuss with the interpreter at the beginning of the year how you want to communicate and to remind him or her later if need be. The interpreter may not know your preferences, and you can help him or her to understand.

If you can use spoken English, you may do better in quiet rooms with just one or two people. It may be harder to understand speech if there are a lot of people around or if the room is noisy. It is okay to talk with your teachers and classmates who are hearing about what helps you hear better. For example, there might be a quiet place in the hall where you can hear your friends better and you should tell them that.

Becoming More Independent as You Grow Older

- If you are young, your interpreter may help you sometimes. For example, he or she may assist you in understanding how to use an interpreter during class to talk with your teachers and classmates who are hearing. Your interpreter may also help your classmates understand how to talk with you.
- Your interpreter may tutor you after class if your parents and teachers agree. The interpreter should not tutor you during class instruction.
- Deaf adults say that it can be challenging to learn new information from an interpreter. It is okay to ask the interpreter to repeat something or to help you understand what a new sign means. If you don't understand information, you can ask the interpreter to interpret your follow-up questions to the teacher.
- If you are older, you should be learning how to become more independent in using an interpreter. For example, in high school you may be responsible for scheduling an interpreter. This procedure is good to learn because then you will know how to do it when you leave high school and are an adult.
- You should talk with your teachers if you cannot always understand the interpreter. The teachers need to know if you are missing information.
- You should not talk with the interpreter about anything unrelated to school during class lessons. Class time is for learning. However, chatting casually with the interpreter is okay if all students have free time, although personal issues should not be discussed.

Situations that make listening easier:

- talking in a quiet place,
- listening in a quiet classroom in which only the teacher is talking, and
- listening to a teacher when you can see his or her face.

Situations that make listening more challenging:

- class discussions with a lot of speakers;
- small group discussion when other groups are also talking;
- talking with a group of classmates;
- sports activities in which people are moving around;
- noisy environments; and
- a teacher who moves around a lot, making it difficult to see his or her face.

Sometimes your school audiologist can help make the classroom a better place for listening. It is okay to let people know what can help you listen better.

Some interpreters have not previously worked with students who speak and sign. You should discuss how you like to communicate during an IEP meeting with the interpreter present. The interpreter is a professional who wants to do whatever is best for you. You can help your teachers and interpreters to understand your communication needs.

Preparing for Using Interpreters When You are an Adult

By the time you graduate from high school, you should be prepared for your role as an adult who uses interpreting services. You should understand how to work with an interpreter. You should know how to request an interpreter. These skills are important for college, for work, and for meeting with people such as doctors and potential employers. Schools have a responsibility to help you prepare for becoming an adult.

Many times it is very helpful to talk with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing about how they use an interpreter. You can ask your school to help you find adults with whom to talk. You can also suggest to your school that you and your classmates who use interpreters have some workshops with some adults who are deaf or hard of hearing. If you live in an area where there are no adults

who are deaf or hard of hearing, you can arrange to talk with someone using a videophone or computer video technology.

Many adults who are deaf or hard of hearing will help the interpreter understand how they want to communicate. Learning about your own communication needs is important to help you use interpreters in your future.

Technology and Interpreting

You should learn about using a computer to use an interpreter. You can use an interpreter through the Internet to make phone calls to talk with people who are hearing. You can call your classmates who are hearing. Your school should help you learn to use technology to get interpreting services so that you know how to apply it even when at home. You can order a pizza, check to see if a store has something you want to buy, etc., using Internet interpreting.

If you prefer to use spoken English but cannot hear other people very well, there are special telephones which allow you to speak while a person who can hear interprets what the other person is saying to you. Your school can help you learn about special telephones and other technology that can help you communicate with others.

Your school should help you find websites where you can see other signers, learn new signs, and learn what is happening with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing in the United States and around the world.



Helping Others Understand the Purpose of Educational Interpreters

You probably already have experience with teachers and classmates who are hearing and who do not understand that you are the person talking, not the interpreter, or they might think that the interpreter is only supposed to work with you.

People who can hear often do not understand how to use an interpreter. You may need to have a polite conversation with them about this topic. You may want to tell someone after class what can make communication better for both of you.

People who are hearing may also forget to do things that help communication. For example, they may look at the interpreter and not at you,

causing you to feel left out. You may need to remind others of what you need.

Your interpreter or another person who is deaf or hard of hearing can help you learn how to explain the purpose and role of interpreters.

You can find more information about classroom interpreting at www.classroominterpreting.org. For more information and resources about the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, visit www.clerccenter.gallaudet.edu. You will also find all the guides in our Classroom Interpreting series on our website.

About the Author: Brenda Schick, PhD, a professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder, studies the development of spoken and sign language and its relationship to cognition in children who are deaf or hard of hearing. She has had three National Institutes of Health grants investigating language and/or cognitive development in children who are deaf or hard of hearing, including Theory of Mind. Each grant required data collection across the nation and the development of language assessment tools for American Sign Language (ASL). Schick is currently a member of a research center that focuses on literacy and young deaf and hard of hearing children. She has also served as the school board president for an ASL/English school for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and is a former teacher of the deaf. She developed a videotaped curriculum for hearing parents learning sign language and translated a series of classic children's storybooks into sign language. Schick grew up in a culturally deaf family, is fluent in ASL, and is a former certified interpreter of the deaf.

This guide was developed in collaboration with staff in the Center for Childhood Deafness at Boys Town National Research Hospital.



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