



ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

*The Accessibility and Disability working group of
Shambhala international
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Accommodating People Who Are Deaf or Hearing Impaired

Whatever you might think, you do have members, friends, and visitors to your centre with hearing impairments.

Loss of hearing is generally agreed to be the most isolating of all physical disabilities. With our average age rising, this is a rapidly increasing issue in our sangha.

What is a Hearing Impairment?

Hearing loss can span from having a slight degree but workable degree of loss to profound-a hearing loss of such severity that communication is not possible with auditory means.

What are the results of hearing impairment?

People who are hard of hearing *may* use speech to communicate. They may or may not use

personal hearing aids. Even if they have personal hearing aids, additional assistive listening devices may be required to access speech at a distance, on the phone, in noisy surroundings, and in other situations. People who are hard of hearing sometimes supplement the auditory gaps by using speech reading and contextual clues.

People who are profoundly deaf do not depend on hearing for communication. Communication is completely dependent on visual information, including lip reading and sign languages, which are specific to certain regions. In North America the language is American Sign Language.

Etiquette and Disability & Accessibility

Etiquette may seem a rather formal term to portray the give and take of our interactions with other people. And yet, etiquette really feels like the right word to use to describe the thoughtful, considerate behaviour that we expect to receive from others and give to them.

Until you know someone with a disability, you may never have had reason to think about the key points that make relationships with someone who has a disability easier and more relaxed.

How to work with a person who is deaf or has hearing problems

- Let the person take the lead in establishing the communication mode, such as lip-reading, sign language, or writing notes.
- Look directly at the person you are speaking to. If you are working with a sign language interpreter, talk directly to the person who is deaf, not to the interpreter. While working, the

interpreter is not a participant in the conversation, but a transmitter for the person who is deaf.

- Don't cover your mouth, and don't create shadow on your face by standing with your back or side to a bright light or window.
- Talk directly to the person, even when a sign language interpreter is present.
- If the person lip-reads face him or her directly; speak clearly and at a moderate speed.
- Speak at a slow to moderate rate and don't use exaggerated lip movement. Some people's voices are easier to understand. Women with soft voices can be more difficult to understand.
- Don't shout - it won't help. Hearing aids make sounds louder, not clearer.
- To get a person's attention, gently tap the deaf/hard of hearing person on the arm or elbow and make sure they are looking at you before you speak.
- Be aware that being able to hear conversation in a crowd and/or with background noise is most difficult.

Basic Points of Disability Etiquette for Greeters

- Move to offer assistance only after asking if it is wanted. Many people with disabilities prefer to maintain as much independence as possible. If they want help, ask for specific instructions.
- A smile along with a spoken greeting is always appropriate. A handshake is not a standard greeting for everyone.
- Speak directly to a person with a disability, never just to people with him or her.

- Relax. Anyone can make mistakes. Keep a sense of humour and a willingness to communicate.

Hearing and practice events

People do not like to always have to identify themselves as a person with a disability. *When planning an event, add a note about accessibility needs with a direct number to a real person.* That opens the door for the person to reach out and not feel like they are imposing.

A hearing impairment is a hidden disability; always assume there is a person in your group with hearing loss so face your audience.

One effective approach at talks for someone who is deaf is sign language interpreters or some form of real time transcription.

Although it is impractical to have a sign language interpreter available at all times, one approach is to hire an interpreter for medium or large events. A translator who is a Buddhist would be ideal. Members of the Deaf community might be able to help your centre find volunteer interpreters for a variety of events.

Do you offer a regularly scheduled open house with a sign language interpreter on hand, that could be advertised in the Deaf community? Is there a significant Deaf community in your area that makes this a worthwhile approach?

Larger centres may install assistive listening devices – which can also be rented for larger events. Some centres have used real time transcription, improved sound systems, preferred seating for visual cuing.

See the section on contacting us below for resource lists and useful checklists for centre administrators working on making centres accessible. Here you may find answers to questions such as 'what is an assistive listening device and how much do they cost?'

Tips for Using a Sign Language Interpreter

- Be yourself, use your ordinary language and speaking style. Speak in the first person, just like you are having a normal voice-to-voice conversation with a person. Avoid such phrases as "Tell her," and "Explain to him."
- Speak in your normal tone, at your normal pace. The interpreter will tell you if you need to pause or slow down. If you use a word that the interpreter is unfamiliar with, he or she may ask you to spell it.
- If you are using written notes, or teaching from a written text, it is helpful to offer a copy to the person who is deaf.
- Try to avoid personal conversations with the interpreter during the professional situation. He or she is working as a means of language-transmission, not as a participant.
- Relax. If you are unsure of the appropriate way to proceed in a particular situation, just ask. Conversing, through an interpreter, with a person who is deaf, can be very comfortable. It is such a natural process, you may find yourself forgetting that there is an interpreter.

Problems with signing and guided meditation

When working with the hearing impaired you will not be able to talk while people are meditating

because the group has to look at the interpreter for everything that is said. For instance, the posture, breath, and thoughts section of the instruction must have distinct breaks between each for the next instruction.

About the Accessibility and Disability working group of Shambhala international

We are the Shambhala International working group for accessibility and disability, part of the Shambhala Office of the Societal Health and Well-Being. We are charged with providing information for making Shambhala International accessible, physically, in print and electronically.

Contact us

We have several websites:

- The A & D working group Shambhala network group <http://shambhalanetwork.org/groups/accessibility-and-disability/forum/>
- The Accessibility and disability network web: <http://www.shambhala.org/community/da.php>

The websites, besides containing discussion forums also have lots of useful downloadable documents (like this one)

You can email us at accessibility.in.shambhala@gmail.com

or write to:

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