

# BEING DEAF AWARE AT RNID STAFF SUMMITS

**What you need to know  
about communications methods  
and support**

## RNID Deaf Awareness Group

We use a rich variety of communication methods and support at our Staff Summits. We all have a responsibility to make sure communication at the events – whether you're leading a workshop, taking part in a discussion, or having a chat over dinner - is accessible for us all.

Here, we run through the different types of communication and support you might come across at the summit, how each of them works and some dos and don'ts for each one to make sure we can all be as inclusive as possible.

### BSL and BSL interpreters

BSL interpreters enable communication between deaf sign language users and hearing people: it's a two-way process.



#### Do: ✓

- speak to the deaf person, not the interpreter
- make sure your message is clear
- be aware that the interpreter may not be familiar with some acronyms or jargon
- use interpreters for social conversations as well as work topics

#### Don't: ✗

- feel that interpreters are only there for deaf staff
- use the third person: "tell him I said..." when communicating with the interpreter, just direct speech to the deaf person

### Lipreading and lipspeakers

Lipreading is the ability to recognise lip shapes, patterns, and facial expressions to understand what is being said. It requires a lot of guesswork and can be really tiring.

There are communication support professionals called 'Lip Speakers', who work in a similar way to BSL Interpreters, relaying speech clearly to people who rely on lipreading



#### Do: ✓

- face someone who is lipreading (rather than the lipspeaker)
- ensure good background lighting
- speak at your natural pace
- rephrase if needed (some words can be harder to lipread than others)
- use facial expressions (this helps to communicate the 'tone' of the conversation),
- allow time for the lipspeaker to relay the spoken information

#### Don't: ✗

- overexaggerate speech (this distorts lip patterns)
- talk with hands obscuring the face
- wait for the lipspeaker to finish before beginning your next sentence

### Assistance dogs

These can include hearing dogs, guide dogs and dual-trained dogs. You will know the type of dog by its harness: Hearing dogs have a burgundy coat, guide dogs have a white harness with blue guide dog logo and yellow reflective sleeve, if the guide dog owner is also deaf then they will have a red and white reflective sleeve. Dual purpose assistance dogs have a yellow coat and may sometimes have their harness on for guiding and their yellow coat on if not guiding.



#### Do: ✓

- approach with care especially if the dog is working and tap or touch the owner to let them know you are there
- Let the owner know if the dog is disrupting your way and if they need to move.

#### Don't: ✗

- Guide dogs are working dogs, and their boundaries need to be respected. Don't distract, call, or pet the dog, unless you've received clear instruction from the owner to do so.

## Speech-to-Text Reporters (STTRs)

STTRs provide professional communication support for deaf and hard of hearing people – usually people who have English as their first or preferred language.

STTRs listen to what is being said and simultaneously convert this to text on a screen. This is a word-for-word, not a summary, account. This enables a deaf or hard of hearing person to follow exactly what is being said and to participate fully. In addition, where relevant, the STTR will indicate environmental sounds, such as laughter or an interruption by a mobile phone.

### Do: ✓

- remember that the STTRs must be able to hear you when presenting and if you're commenting from the audience, as with interpreters
- either avoid jargon and acronyms, or provide this information as preparation beforehand
- provide the STTR with a list of attendee names so they can accurately type who is saying what

### Don't: ✗

- talk over each other because this is difficult to type and for the STTR to keep up with what is being said
- tell the STTR not to type something (for example a joke) - colleagues using STTR are entitled to the same information in any interaction

## Room loops and personal listeners

A hearing loop helps people with hearing loss to hear conversations more easily. It works when a person's hearing aids, cochlear implant or loop listener is switched to the hearing loop setting. Sound is transmitted wirelessly directly to the hearing device. This reduces the distracting background noises.

A personal listener (such as the Roger system) greatly improves the clarity of sound by allowing a human voice or another desired sound source, to be fed electronically into the listening device, reducing background noise and sound loss between speaker and listener.

### Do: ✓

- check in or get tips from the listener(s)
- ask if they can hear ok and check for visual cues i.e. flinching if it's too loud

### Don't: ✗

- change how you speak!
- shouting, speaking slowly, or holding the microphone too close can all distort the sound making it harder for the listener to process.



## Deafblind communication

### Do: ✓

- If you are using BSL, the deafblind person may need to place their hands on yours - this is called Hands On Signing and it allows them to feel what you are signing. Do continue to sign as you normally would.
- Alternatively, the person may need to step back to enable them to see you signing within their visual frame - this is called Visual Frame signing. Do step back if they ask you to.

### Don't: ✗

- Don't expect that a deafblind person will see you and approach you. Please approach them.