

# Myths about deafness

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Similar to other cultures, deaf people experience stereotyping by those who do not know and understand their culture. A number of myths circulate widely in our society and interfere with understanding deaf people.

**Myth:** *Deaf people lead totally different lives than other people.*

**Fact:** In general, deaf people occupy their time just as anyone else. They work, marry, raise families, drive cars, use the phone, go shopping and pay taxes. Individual differences do exist, but chances are when you meet a deaf person, you may share several similar interests.

**Myth:** *All deaf people can read lips.*

**Fact:** Some deaf people are very skilled speechreaders but many are not. Only 30 percent of spoken English is visible on the lips because many speech sounds have identical mouth movements. For example, p and b look exactly alike on the lips.

**Myth:** *All deaf people are mute.*

**Fact:** Deaf people have the physical ability to produce sound. Some speak very well, while others choose not to use their voice if they think they are difficult to understand. It is difficult for most deaf people to gauge the pitch or volume of their voice.

**Myth:** *People who are deaf are deaf and dumb.*

**Fact:** The inability to hear affects neither intelligence nor the physical ability to produce sounds. Deaf people find this label particularly offensive.

**Myth:** *Deaf people are less intelligent.*

**Fact:** The inability to hear is unrelated to intelligence. Hearing people's lack of knowledge about deafness, however, has often limited educational and occupational opportunities for deaf people.

**Myth:** *All deaf people use sign language to communicate.*

**Fact:** American Sign Language (ASL) is the language of many deaf people. Some deaf people use one or more of a variety of communication systems based on the English language.

**Myth:** *Deaf people can't use the telephone.*

**Fact:** Special telecommunication devices, such as TTYs/TDDs and ring signalers, are used by many deaf people. Paging systems are also widely used by members of the deaf community.

**Myth:** *All deaf people use hearing aids.*

**Fact:** Some deaf people benefit considerably from hearing aids; others may only be able to hear loud environmental sounds, such as a fire alarm or a car horn. Still others may not benefit at all from their use.

**Myth:** *Hearing aids restore hearing.*

**Fact:** Hearing aids amplify sound but do not correct hearing. They have no effect on a person's ability to process sound. A hearing aid may enable a person to hear someone's voice, but it may not enable them to understand and distinguish words.

**Myth:** *Deaf people cannot appreciate the arts because they can't hear music, movies, etc.*

**Fact:** The National Theater for the Deaf and other deaf theater companies are an intricate part of the deaf community. Deaf people have participated in and contributed to the performing arts; actress Marlee Matlin and Linda Bove are just a couple examples. Captioning allows deaf people enjoy movies and videotapes.

*This information is available in other forms to people with disabilities by calling 651-431-2351 voice, 888-206-6501 TTY; for speech-to-speech telephone re-voice services, call 1-877-627-3848.*



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

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## Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division

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