

Do's and Don'ts of Deaf Culture

DO'S:

- Tap gently on the shoulder to get attention.
- If beyond the reach to tap, wave in the air until eye contact is established.
- Switch lights on and off to get attention.
- Establish a comfortable distance between you and the person involved in communication.
- Establish eye contact before beginning communication. This is considered a stare in other cultures but not in Deaf culture. South African Sign Language (SASL) is a visual language, and therefore the eyes are used to process the message.
- Eye contact can also be used as a turn-taking technique, especially in group discussions where everyone looks at the next speaker.
- Wait for your turn to start signing (equivalent to speaking).
- Keep the face clear of any obstruction, e.g. hair, scarf, etc.
- Show that you are attentive by nodding slightly. If you are expressionless, it conveys inattentiveness.

DON'TS:

- Do not touch elsewhere on the body to get attention, e.g. head, face, stomach, etc.
- Do not use a fist/punch to get attention.
- Do not kick or throw things to get attention.
- Do not stand against light or a window.
- Do not pass between two people signing. If you have to, excuse yourself before walking through.
- Do not stand too close.
- Do not look away during the conversation as that denotes termination of communication.
- Do not sign with hands full of objects, e.g. cup, books, etc.
- Do not eat or chew anything while signing.
- Do not stand in a dark spot.