Deaf Culture 101

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CSA Specialty - Deaf/Hard of Hearing Services

- A big VICTORY for Deaf and Hard of Hearing community here in Massachusetts
- Recognized us as cultural and linguistic - Specialty Population
History

- Rich history recounted in stories, books, films
- Members of the Deaf community have a strong interest in the history of their culture.
- A sense of common history bridges generations
Deaf Culture describes...

- social beliefs
- behaviors
- art
- literary traditions
- history
- values
- shared institutions of deaf people who use sign language.
Description of Deaf Population - Demographics

- A capital “D” is always used to differentiate those in the Deaf Culture from individuals who are deaf.

- Individuals who are deaf and identify themselves as part of the Deaf Culture.

- The inability to hear is the basis to their distinct cultural group.

- To the Deaf community, deafness is by no means considered a disability.
Characteristics of a Culture as applied to the Deaf Community

Collective Name/Title:

- Deaf Culture
- Deaf World
- Deaf Community
Knowledge

- Deaf individuals have cultural-specific knowledge.
- Knowledge of prominent leaders and their characteristics.
- Knowledge of the concerns of rank-and-file members of the Deaf Culture.
- Important historical events
- Knowledge of how to manage trying situations with hearing people.
- Knowing when and with whom to use American Sign Language and when to use English-marked varieties of sign language
Customs

- The Deaf World has its own ways of doing introductions and departures
- Specific ways of taking turns in a conversation
- Customs of speaking frankly and speaking politely
- Collective name customs
- Customs of kinship
- Customs of language
Example #1:
Initial Interactions

- Greetings within Deaf culture consist of using full name (first and last) followed by where person attended school.

- During interaction there is a strong effort to find out if each participant has someone from the local or national level that each knows.

- Affection in the form of hugging is often used in greetings or before departure.

- Touching during conversation is used to add emotion or emphasis to what is being communicated.
Example #2:

Honesty

- What hearing society views as “rude” Deaf people view as acquiring details.

- For example, it is not uncommon for a Deaf person to acknowledge if a person has gained weight
Example #3:

Communicating with Hearing People

- Usually able to distinguish if a person that uses sign language is Deaf or hearing because hearing people sign more like English language.

- When signing to a hearing person Deaf individuals “Code Switch” or use “Pigeon Talk” (like Creole) to accommodate to hearing individuals version of American Sign Language, which when hearing people use, is more like an English translation.

- Deaf individuals tend to use voice while signing to hearing persons.
Social Structure

- There are many organizations in Deaf Culture.
  - Athletic
  - Social
  - Political
  - Literary
  - Religious
Kinship

- Residential schools provide a community to which many individuals in the Deaf Culture have the most connections and feelings of kinship toward other members of the culture.
- Travel is centered around visiting residential schools.
- There is a strong bond between Deaf individuals of different cultures even though they share no common territory.
Language/Communication

- American Sign Language (ASL) is a full rich language with its own grammar and syntax.

- A systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures or marks having understood meanings.
Means of Communication for Deaf/deaf and Hard of Hearing People

- American Sign Language
- Oral
- SEE (Sign Exact English)
- Total Communication
- Cued Speech
- Home Signs
- Visual Gestures
Communication

- A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system

- How can one communicate effectively with a deaf person if the system is not common?
Methods of Deaf Education

- Mainstreaming or Integration
- Total Communication
- Least Restrictive Environment
- Residential Schools for the Deaf
- Day and Magnet School Programs
- Extracurricular Activities
- Bilingual Education
Mitigating Factors

- Family Background
- Cultural Background
- Socioeconomic Status
- Education
- Parents
- Siblings
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- What does it mean to you?
- Accessibility?
- Protection?
- Culture?
The Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101, et seq. (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794 prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including depriving them of the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation, including hospitals and other health care providers. To ensure an equal opportunity to use their services, hospitals and other health care facilities must provide “effective communication” to individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing by providing appropriate “auxiliary aids and services,” including the provision of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter services and assistive listening devices.
Interpreting

- ASL and English are two distinct languages
- An interpreter is translating the languages for the parties involved
- Every time something is translated, a part of it can be lost in the process
- Skilled interpreters must be able to negotiate all potential means of communication between all parties involved
Mental Health Issues

- Historically, decisions about mental health issues and the deaf have always been made by hearing people.
- The unwillingness to involve D/deaf people in this process has created a severe lack of trust, that still exists today, between the two communities.
- Hearing, culturally sensitive, language competent mental health professionals can sometimes gain the trust of D/deaf people.
- The lack of trust and the number of misunderstandings throughout the process has led to resistance by many people in the D/deaf community to any mental health diagnosis.
Consequences/Ramifications of Not Providing Full Access to Information

- Frustration on the child’s part
- Frustration on the family’s part
- Delays in providing full medical care
- Inappropriate placements
- Disconnect between parents and child
- Disconnect between medical personnel and families
- Failed treatment plans
Questions to Ponder....

- Do you believe that everyone has a right to full access of information?
- Would you accept it if your child or relative was in a crisis situation and the responding team could not communicate with you?
- How can we ensure that everyone has full access to information?
- How does it challenge your beliefs to think of Deaf people as a linguistic and cultural minority group and not as a handicapped group of people?
Resources

- Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing [www.mass.gov/mcdhh](http://www.mass.gov/mcdhh)
  
  - To request an interpreter click on “Request an interpreter” at the left of the screen

- Massachusetts State Association for the Deaf [www.msad.org](http://www.msad.org)

- National Association of the Deaf [www.nad.org](http://www.nad.org)

- The Learning Center for the Deaf [www.tlcdeaf.org](http://www.tlcdeaf.org)

- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf [www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)