



Fact Sheet Deaf Culture

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There are two predominant ways to look at deafness: one way is as a medical matter and another is to see deafness as a cultural identity.

Deaf culture, usually denoted with a capital 'D', refers to a group who self-identify with deafness as a distinct cultural identity. Their first language is usually sign language -- often American Sign Language (ASL) but, in French-speaking Canada, also Quebec Sign Language (QSL).

Some deaf, deafened or hard of hearing people seek to adapt themselves to the hearing world and communicate through speech reading and using spoken language.

Others identify with sign language as part of their distinct cultural identity. Deaf culture has its own expressions, traditions, norms, literature, poetry, rituals, humour and theatre. It also has particular social rules that differ from those of the majority hearing culture.

Cultural differences can sometimes result in confused interactions or misunderstanding between hearing and deaf people.

When counselling a deaf client, or working with an employer who is hiring a deaf employee, it is important to keep this fact in mind. For many in the Deaf community, English is a second language to ASL. Cultural misunderstandings can arise in a workplace as easily as between any distinct cultural groups.

Each person can identify with Deaf culture differently and it is important to ask your client their preferred means of communication and preferred way of self-identifying.

For more information on this or other issues related to counselling a deaf, deafened or hard of hearing client, see OAYEC and the Canadian Hearing Society's **Youth Dynamic: An Employment Services Guide for Working with Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing Youth** at www.oayec.org.

Or visit the Canadian Hearing Society's website at www.chs.ca