



## **RIGHTS OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE GETTING INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY SERVICES**

If you are DEAF or HARD OF HEARING, and you get services from the state or county for an Intellectual Disability, like living in a home that has staff or going to a day program, you have a right to clear, “effective” communication with the people who help you.

### **What is “Effective” Communication?**

- Communication that is clear enough to you so you understand what is happening, so you can tell your staff what you need and want, so you can get the same services that hearing people get.

Your Supports Coordinator (the person who visits you every month and asks how you are) and your team (everyone who meets together and talks about your services) should make sure you get the help you need for clear communication. They cannot decide what is best for clear communication by themselves. They must ask you in a way that you can understand what will help make communication easier and clearer for you. They may have an expert meet with you to help you figure out what works best for you. They may not always be able to give you exactly what you ask for, but they must give you the best help they can. If the help they give you does not

work you should tell them it is not working and they will need to find a way that works for you.

**Examples of ways to make communication more clear:**

- Giving you staff at home and at your day program or work that know sign language well.
- Using sign language interpreters at meetings and visits.
- Using Communication Access Realtime Translation (known as "CART" or "realtime captioning") - when a person uses a special machine to type everything that is said on a computer so you can read what others are saying.
- Giving you hearing aids (if you are in a Waiver program) or using other hearing equipment that makes it easier for you to hear what other people are saying.
- Giving you special equipment to talk or write with.
- Putting a videophone, a TTY, or another telephone that is louder or lets you see what the other person says, in your home.
- Only one person at a time talking.
- Letting you know who is talking by raising their hand if there is more than you and another person.
- Talking to you in a room that is quiet or does not have a lot of background noise, like turning off a TV or music in the room.
- Talking to you face to face instead of from another room or with their back to you.
- Talking to you slowly and clearly (without shouting).

- Telling you things again in a different way if you do not understand the first time.
- Teaching you to read better.
- Teaching you more sign language.
- Finding you other people to live with or work with who **also** know sign language.
- Helping you find places where other deaf **and hard of hearing people who use sign language** go to meet and talk, like a Deaf church or bowling group.

**What can you do to make sure you have good communication with your staff, housemates and workmates?**

1. Tell your Supports Coordinator you need help. Say or write or gesture that you can't hear well or don't understand what people are saying and want help.
2. Ask your Supports Coordinator for a meeting with your team. If an interpreter or friend can help you explain what you need, tell your Supports Coordinator that you want an interpreter or your friend to be at the meeting.
3. At the meeting, if you can, tell the team exactly what you need at home, at your day program or work, and at meetings. Let them know that it will help you understand more.
4. If you cannot tell them what you need, just keep telling them that communication between you and others is a **BIG PROBLEM**. You do not understand what your staff and/or housemates or coworkers are

saying to you and they are not understanding what you are telling them. Tell them you and YOUR STAFF need help to communicate. They should have someone meet with you who can help figure out what would help you understand and join in what is happening.

5. If you live in a home with staff, tell the staff you need clear communication. Tell them, “I don’t understand”, every time you don’t understand them. Tell them, “You don’t understand me”, every time they don’t understand you. If you can, tell them what would make communication better.
6. If you go to work or a day program, tell the staff there that you need clear communication. If you want to learn to do more things, tell them you want to learn and need someone who can explain things to you in a way you understand. If you can, tell them what would make communication better.
7. If you need equipment, like a videophone or captioned telephone, tell your staff and your Supports Coordinator.
8. If you have friends who are Deaf that you want to meet with, be sure to tell your staff so they can help you find a way to meet with your friends.
9. If you don’t get what you need for clear communication, then when your Supports Coordinator visits you and asks if you are happy with your services, say “No”. Tell your Supports Coordinator that you are not happy because you need more clear communication.
10. If you still don’t get what you need for clear communication every day, then tell a friend or family member, and you or they can call or write to us at:

Disability Rights Pennsylvania  
1315 Walnut Street, Suite 500  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
(800) 692-7443

If you believe you have been discriminated against by your house staff or staff who help you at work or in the community, you may file a Complaint with:

- Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights at –  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/complaints/>
- Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Disability Rights Section - NYA  
Washington, DC 20530
- Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission at –  
[http://www.phrc.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/file\\_a\\_complaint/18976](http://www.phrc.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/file_a_complaint/18976)

## **Contact Information**

If you need more information or need help, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TDD). The email address is: [intake@disabilityrightspa.org](mailto:intake@disabilityrightspa.org).

The mission of Disability Rights Pennsylvania is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Due to our limited resources, Disability Rights Pennsylvania cannot provide individual services to every person with advocacy and legal issues. Disability Rights Pennsylvania prioritizes cases that have the

potential to result in widespread, systemic changes to benefit persons with disabilities. While we cannot provide assistance to everyone, we do seek to provide every individual with information and referral options.

**IMPORTANT: This publication is for general informational purposes only. This publication is not intended, nor should be construed, to create an attorney-client relationship between Disability Rights Pennsylvania and any person. Nothing in this publication should be considered to be legal advice.**

**PLEASE NOTE: For information in alternative formats or a language other than English, contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania at 800-692-7443, Ext. 400, TDD: 877-375-7139 or [intake@disabilityrightspa.org](mailto:intake@disabilityrightspa.org).**

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