

How to Say the Right Thing

SignVideo wording guidelines for use when talking about the deaf BSL community

We want you to benefit from your commitment to the BSL community and it is therefore very important that you are aware of the need for care and precision whilst drafting and publishing your publicity materials and/or social media content, especially when talking about members of the community that we work in - deaf BSL users.

There are things we think all our partners should be aware of while they promote their new BSL SignVideo service.

The word “deaf”

When most people see or hear the word “deaf”, they immediately think of this in a medical/health context: an impairment, a disability, a missing sense and/or a deprivation. Actually, one in seven people in the UK has a hearing loss. They generally identify themselves as hard of hearing, deafened or even deaf. They generally are English speakers and are comfortable communicating through spoken or written language and most may not know any sign language. They use other assistive communication devices such as telephone amplifiers, text phones, emails and/or Text Relay services when they wish to contact you. They may want you to activate the induction loop (if it is installed) when they visit your premises as they hear more clearly through this with their hearing aids.

British Sign Language users

Deaf BSL users are a distinct language group with its own form of communication. You might be surprised to discover that they don't identify themselves primarily as disabled and often see themselves more belonging to a language minority with their own cultural differences from that of their peers in this country. They don't see their “lack of hearing” as a barrier in their lives apart from that of communication - in short the BSL community face a problem if the service they wish to use is not available in BSL. It is just like how you would feel in a foreign country where no one

knows English and all services are not available in English. It is worth being aware that there is nothing worse you can do to a BSL user than call them hearing impaired or a person with a hearing disability.

We encounter many Disability Trainers and Consultants who may not understand this fact or through their own ideals or for the sake of convenience, prefer to include deaf people in the generic disability movement. Unfortunately this often leads to well meaning organisations including these inappropriate terms and classifications within their communications, and therefore running the risk of alienating those they wish to include. It devalues that company's efforts and investments. By introducing them as deaf BSL users, you become an ambassador of British Sign Language, one of the indigenous languages in the UK among Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish. You will gain their trust by showing respect for their language and understanding where they are coming from.

By providing deaf BSL users a choice to contact you through the SignVideo BSL service, you are actually empowering them. This is a huge step in accessibility for people who up until now have been unable to do business with you. You don't want to harm it by talking about them in a way that makes them feel like they are receiving special treatment because they have an illness.

We know that there is still much to do in terms of spreading awareness of this linguistic and cultural minority. That's why we have put together a list of recommended terminology, to help you say the right thing when you choose wording for the web page for your SignVideo Live link, write a press release or promote the service through your social media.

Quick reference guide – recommended terminology for use when talk about the deaf BSL community

Terms to avoid

- hearing impaired people
- people with hearing loss
- people with a hearing disability
- people with hearing difficulties
- deaf and dumb
- deaf-mute
- signer
- support
- help
- rely on sign language

Recommended terminology

- Deaf or Hard of Hearing people who use British Sign Language (BSL)
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing British Sign Language (BSL) users
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing people whose preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL)
- Deaf
- deaf
- Registered British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter
- BSL interpreter
- interpreter
- translate from BSL to English
- relay from BSL to English
- opportunity/choice to use BSL