

# Insights into the Deaf Community

## Deaf Culture.

*For more information on this topic see the Australian Association of the Deaf (AAD) website: [www.aad.org.au](http://www.aad.org.au)*

Culture is about the way we do things and the beliefs and values we hold. Deaf communities have many distinctive cultural characteristics, some of which are shared across different countries. Characteristics of Deaf culture include:

### Language:

Sign language is at the centre of Deaf culture. Anyone who does not value sign language is unlikely to feel comfortable within Deaf culture or to be accepted by it. If a person can show they understand and respect the value of sign language, Deaf people will help them to learn it. Without this respectful attitude they are unlikely to receive a warm welcome.

### Values:

- **Deaf is normal:** for culturally Deaf people, to be Deaf is a natural and accepted state of being, part of their life and identity.
- **Deaf babies are highly valued**

### Behaviour (Features of behaviour that differ from typical "hearing" behaviour):

- **Eye Contact** is more important and to look away can be rude.
- **Touch** is more acceptable as it is needed to get attention.
- **Physical proximity** is further apart so as to see the whole "signing space".
- **Directness** Deaf people are more blunt and abrupt than hearing people.
- **Thumping on tables/floors** to gain each other's attention
- **Noisy!** Deaf people are not aware how much noise they're making.

### Customs:

- **Who are you?** More personal details are provided at a first meeting to give information about their family or community connections, especially if they come from a family with generations of Deaf people – such families are at the core of the Deaf Community.
- **The long goodbye** when leaving a gathering the custom is to seek out one's friends and in the process of saying goodbye, discuss when they next expect to meet (whether plans are vague or concrete).
- **Technology** to make living as a Deaf person in a predominantly hearing culture more comfortable and convenient eg: flashing lights (for door, phone and crying baby), vibrating alarm clocks, TTY's etc (as distinct from "hearing technology" such as hearing aids, cochlear implants etc).
- **Preferred environments** open-plan houses with good sight lines are preferable as are round tables and strong even lighting (eg: kitchens).
- **Humour** is quite different to hearing peoples' and is very visually based.