

DEAF

Education Terminology



Terminology changes over the years and sometimes outdated terminology can become offensive. An important quote by Maya Angelou states “when you know better, do better”. So, here is a list of terminology to make sure we are doing the best we can. To continue to stay up to date and know better so that you can do better, we encourage you to continue to speak with members of the d/Deaf, d/Deafblind and Hard of Hearing communities, do research online and other places to stay up to date with the most current and appropriate terminology to ensure we are creating safe, inclusive and welcoming spaces.

Deaf (Capital D)

A term used to encompass deaf individuals regardless of their hearing threshold who participate in Deaf culture, society and mode of communication. Sign languages are often the preferred language.

Hard of Hearing

This term is used by individuals who most commonly use listening and spoken language as their primary languages to communicate with. It is used by individuals with various hearing thresholds.

deaf

This term can refer to individuals who have little or no functional hearing, however it can also be used by anyone who has reduced hearing. This is often a medical term but may also be used by individuals who do not identify with the Deaf community.

deafened/late-deafened

Individuals who acquired a hearing difference after birth. These individuals may not identify with either the Deaf or Hard of Hearing Communities.

d/Deafblind

d/Deafblind individuals experience a combination of reduced vision and functional hearing. These individuals will have varying degrees of hearing and vision which affects communication, learning, social interactions, mobility and access to information. This disability is considered an information-gathering disability. These students need support beyond what is provided solely to d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing or having individuals or those with a visual impairment. Students may work with Intervenor who are EAs with specialized training to support the unique needs of d/Deafblind individuals.

d/Deaf-plus (unacceptable)

Previously used when referring to d/Deaf people with additional disabilities. However, preferred terms now include Deafblind, Deaf with CP., etc.

Hearing Impaired (unacceptable)

This is no longer considered an appropriate term to use when referring to d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals. This is a term that is used occasionally in the medical world but does not account for the unique differences between d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and is a deficit focused term. When adequate supports are given, those with diverse hearing thresholds do not feel that their abilities are diminished.

deaf-mute (unacceptable)

This term is not appropriate. Regardless of if a d/Deaf person chooses to speak or sign, this does not make them “mute”. This term prioritizes verbal modes of communication and makes it seem as though d/Deaf individuals who do not speak cannot communicate. However, rich language also comes in the form of visual and tactile, not just auditory.

deaf and dumb (unacceptable)

This term is not appropriate. It originates from the medieval times and the idea that since some deaf individuals did not speak, they were incapable of cognitive functions. This is absolutely not the case and this terminology should never be used.

Sign Language

The official languages of Deaf communities. These are rich and full languages with unique grammar and syntax that span across the globe. There are over 300 different sign languages across the globe. The most common sign language in North America is American Sign Language.

Listening and Spoken Language

Listening and spoken language is often used by deaf individuals and those who consider themselves hard of hearing. Individuals do not have to choose between a sign language or listening and spoken language. There is no disadvantage of learning multiple languages, however there are many benefits!

Teacher of the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing: This term is more inclusive than the term Hearing Resource Teacher (HRT). The title ‘Teacher of the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing’ recognizes that there are multiple modalities of communication and that hearing is not the only or main focus for our students. Teacher of the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing is the term recommended by the Canadian Association of Educators of the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CAEDHH).

WHAT TO DO

When someone uses outdated language



When someone uses outdated offensive language, it's best to address it directly. Calmly explain why the term is problematic and suggest a more appropriate alternative, while focusing on educating them about the harmful connotations of the language. If you feel uncomfortable confronting them directly, you should report the issue to a relevant person to support you.

Choose the right moment

Pick a time when you can privately talk to the individual about their language choice.

Start with empathy

Acknowledge the person might not have intended to offend, but explain that the language they used is considered outdated and offensive.

Explain the issue

Briefly explain why the term is problematic, highlighting its historical context and the negative impact it can have on people.

Offer an alternative

Suggest a more inclusive and respectful term to use instead.

Focus on education

It's important to be aware of how language can impact others, and updating our vocabulary is part of that.

Stay informed

Keep yourself updated on current terminology and evolving social norms related to sensitive language.

"Hey, I just wanted to mention that the term '_____' is considered offensive and outdated. It might be helpful to use '_____' instead."

"Did you know that '_____' is a harmful stereotype? Perhaps we can rephrase that using a more accurate description, such as '_____'. "

"I understand you might not have meant anything by it, but using '_____' can be hurtful to some people. Let's try to be more inclusive with our language. The term '_____' is more up to date with the community."

References and to learn more:

- <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210330-the-harmful-ableist-language-you-unknowingly-use>
- <https://cad-asc.ca/our-work/terminology/>
- <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/glossary/glossary-d/>
- <https://edaud.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RecommendedTerminology2023.pdf>
- <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions/>
- <https://www.popdb.ca/resources>