

Helping Hands: Health & Survival Signs

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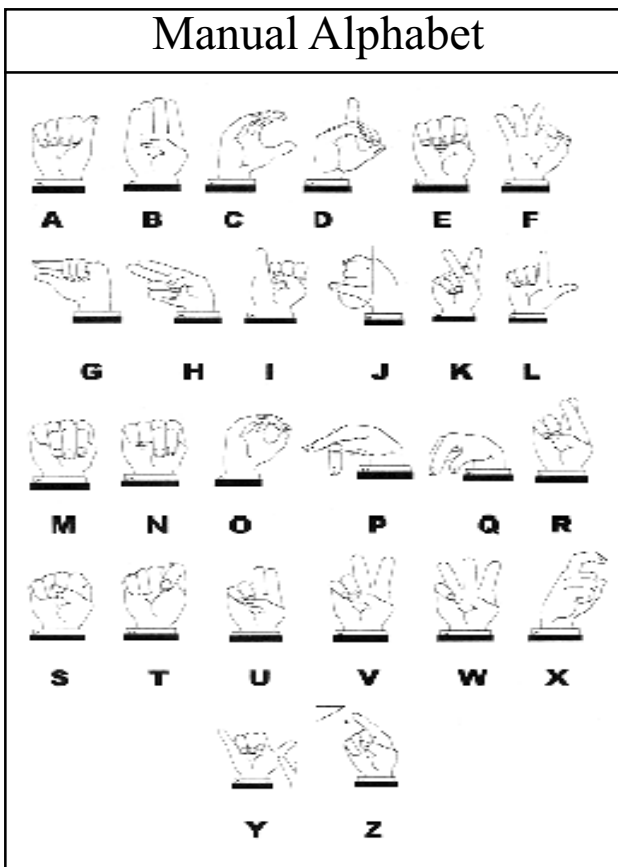
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You're on the scene of a house fire, a car accident, or other emergency situation. How do you respond when the person involved is deaf? This handout illustrates basic sign language centering on a health and survival theme. A good beginning is to learn the manual alphabet and the following signs. You could be instrumental in saving a life by being able to communicate.



- * The manual alphabet is used for technical terms, proper names, and words that have no signs.
- * You can sign left or right handed. Select a dominant hand.
- * The letter hand positions are often used to describe a hand position for an individual word, i.e., the "D" hand position is used to make the doctor sign.

Background

The manual alphabet was invented by a Frenchman, Abbe Charles Michel de L'Epee of Paris, in the 17th century. This process is used to fingerspell a series of alphabetical letters to form a word. The manual alphabet is merely "writing in the air." As you learn the manual alphabet, you will notice that many of the letters are formed on the fingers in a way that resembles the written form.

Fingerspelling Hints

The manual alphabet is easy to learn. Remember to follow these tips when you begin to practice the 26 hand configurations.

- * Hold your selected hand at shoulder height.
- * Keep your arm steady. Avoid bouncing.
- * Vocalize—Say the word as you spell it out.
- * **RULE:** Never hide your lips.

Double Letters

When you have double letters in a word you either make the letter twice or move the hand slightly to the right. For example, in spelling the word "class" you would open and close your hand twice to represent the double "s" at the end of the word. In signing the word "will" you could simply move your hand a little to the right to show the double "l" at the end of this word.

Learning to Finger-Read

It takes some time to learn to finger-read. Here are some suggestions for learning to finger-read the manual alphabet:

- *Talk in fingerspelling to yourself in the mirror.
- *Practice with a sign language partner.
- *Strive for accuracy in making your letters smoothly. Speed will come with time.

Sign Language

Sign languages are **not** universal. Like spoken languages, sign languages around the world are entirely different. American Sign Language (ASL) primarily is used in America and Canada. In the United States, signs vary from city to city, from state to state, etc. Even on the campus of the West Virginia School for the Deaf, there are often several ways to sign a particular word or thought.

The United States has one of the most complete and expressive sign language systems of any country in the world. We owe much to the French sign system, from which many of our present signs, though modified, have been derived.

Interest in sign language continues to grow. Today, it is the fourth most used language in the United States. Many sign language classes are offered in communities, churches, and colleges.

The Art of Signing

Signing is a very visual sign of communication. It uses the entire body through body language and facial expressions. Your body language and facial expressions are as important as your hand signs. If you are happy, look happy. If you are mad, look mad!

There are five factors of a good signer. These are (a) clarity, (b), accuracy, (c) smoothness, (d) rhythm, and (e) speed. With practice, you will be able to improve in all five areas.

Signing Area

When a person signs, he or she should use the signing area. This area is defined as the area from shoulder to shoulder and from forehead to chest. Work to keep your signs within this imaginary box.

Getting Started

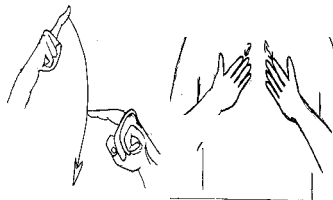
Following are selected signs centering around the health and survival theme. These will be good signs for you to start building your own sign language vocabulary.

Ambulance



The right hand, with fingers extended, is placed above the head to the right and rotates in a small circular fashion imitating a flashing emergency light.

Can't Breathe



Two signs: Can't—Bring the extended right index finger down in front of the chest hitting the extended left index finger as it passes (both palms down). Breathe—With both open hands in front of the chest, one hand above the other and fingers pointing in opposite directions, move the hands forward and back toward the chest with a slow repeated movement.

Child/Children



The right hand, palm down, is extended before the body, as if resting on a child's head. A series of movements, left to right, indicates the number of children.

Deaf



The tip of the right index finger touches the ear and then the closed lips

Doctor



Tap the fingertips of the "D" hand (for doctor) or the "M" hand (for M.D.) palm facing down, on the wrist of the open left hand held in front of the chest, palm up.

Fire



While wiggling the fingers of both open hands, palms facing in, alternately move the hands in upward circles in front of each side of the chest.



Firefighter

The right “B” hand, palm out, is placed high on the forehead.



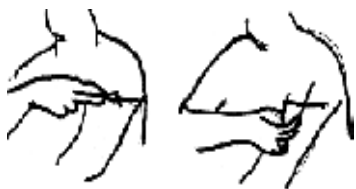
Heart Attack

Two signs: Heart—Using both index fingers, outline a heart over your heart. Attack—The “S” hand hits the palm of the left hand.



Help

With the little-finger side of the left hand, palm facing in, on the palm of the open right hand, the right hand pushes up the left hand.



Hospital

The index and middle fingers of the right “H” hand trace a cross on the upper part of the left arm.



Hurt / Pain

Move the extended index fingers of both hands toward each other in front of the chest with a short repeated movement, palms facing in.



Kid

With the index and little fingers of the right hand extended under the nose, palm facing down, twist the right hand up and down with a small repeated movement.



Need

The right hand, palm down in a fist, with the right index finger extended and bent, moves up and down forcefully once or twice.



Police

Tap the thumb side of the right “C” hand on the left side of the chest, palm facing left.



Poison

Cross both pointer fingers into an “X” in front of the chin.



Sick

Touch the bent middle finger of the right open hand to the forehead while touching the bent middle finger of the left open hand to the lower chest.



Telephone

Mime holding a telephone by bringing the knuckles of the right “Y” hand to near the right ear.

Helpful Web Sites

A Basic Guide to ASL-Created to help you more easily communicate with people who cannot hear. This resource combines text, graphics, and animations to provide word definitions for many common terms.

<http://www.masterstech-home.com/ASLDict.html>

American Sign Language -Online ASL Dictionary is a graphic dictionary of American Sign Language on the Internet. Online ASL Dictionary is provided free for anyone to learn to communicate with deaf people.

<http://dww.deafworldweb.org/asl/>

Animated ASL Dictionary -Animated American Language Dictionary.

<http://www.bconnex.net/~randys/>

SIGNhear Communication Center -a great place on the Internet to learn American Sign Language (ASL)
http://library.advanced.org/10202/asl_dictionary_text.html

West Virginia Relay Service

The West Virginia Relay Service is operated under contract by AT&T. The Service relays conversations between people who use text telephones (TTYs) or telebraille (TB) and people who use standard telephones, 24 hours a day, every day. There is no charge to access the West Virginia Relay Service. (You pay your regular long-distance charges.)

How Relay Service Works

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech-disabled types his or her conversation using a TTY. The message is relayed by a skilled Communications Assistant (CA) who reads it to the hearing person at the other end verbatim. The CA then relays the hearing person's exact spoken words by typing them back to the TTY user. Each call is handled in strict confidence.

For more information, call
1 800 982-8771 (TTY)
1 800 982-8772 (Voice)

Community Service Projects

Make a difference in your community!

- * Donate books, dictionaries, CDs, and/or tapes on signing to your local library.
- * Organize a signing class in your community or during 4-H camp.
- * Sponsor a signing workshop designed especially for emergency personnel. Invite rescue squads, hospital workers, police and fire department personnel.
- * Compile a list of interpreters in your local area who could be called upon in an emergency. Provide this information to emergency services.
- * Take a signing class yourself!

References:

Collins, S. Harold, *Can I Help? Helping the Hearing Impaired in Emergency Situations*, 1993.

Costello, Elaine, *Signing: How to Speak with Your Hands*, Bantam Books, September 1995.

Groode, Joyce Linden, *Fingerspelling*, 1992.
VHS: 120 minutes; voiced; closed captioned

Lawrence, Edgar D., *Sign Language Made Simple*, 1990. (Book and Practice Tape)

Riekehof, Lottie L., *The Joy of Signing*, 2nd Edition, 1987.

Sternberg, Martin L.A., *American Sign Language Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994. (Also available on CD-ROM.)

For more information on deafness and deaf culture, please contact:

The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind
301 East Main Street, Romney, WV 26757
Phone: 304-822-4800 (voice/TTY)

W.Va. Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
Charity Reedy Hines, Executive Director
Building 3, Room 215, State Capitol Complex
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305
Phone: 304-558-2175 (voice/TTY)
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