

# Communicating with Deaf, Non-BSL Speakers

Guidance for professionals



# About Merseyside Society for Deaf People

At MSDP we have worked with the Deaf community in Merseyside since 1864. Our mission is to address the many **barriers** and **inequalities** experienced by **Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people**.

We aim to provide accessible services to help these people achieve a full, active and influencing role in mainstream society. We support all types of Deaf people, including **non-BSL speakers** from other countries.



## A message from our Advice and Support Manager

Over the years I have worked with a lot of people in Merseyside whose first language is not BSL or English. It is difficult not having a common language, but they have come to MSDP for help, so I always try and find a way to communicate.



**Mark Hart,**  
MSDP

The purpose of this handbook is to provide practical advice as well as a bank of useful images for professionals working with **Deaf, non-BSL** and **non-English speakers** (for instance refugees, asylum seekers or migrants). We have tried to include images that can aid communication on a range of common topics.

If there is a topic you would like to see added to a future edition, then please get in touch:  
**[reception@msdp.org.uk](mailto:reception@msdp.org.uk)**



## How to use the handbook

- 1 Ask the client if they know any sign language. Start with British Sign Language. If this is unsuccessful try International Sign or any other Sign Languages the staff member knows.
- 2 Look at any paperwork they have brought i.e. Universal Credit application form.
- 3 Once you have an idea of why they have come, find the relevant picture pages you might need from the handbook and lay them out.
- 4 We suggest the book is kept in a binder (and ideally laminated) so pages can be easily taken out and returned.

## General tips for communicating with Deaf clients

- Use gestures and visual communication  
Pointing, acting and facial expressions can help convey meaning. Use simple, universal signs like shaking your head, nodding or thumbs up/down.
- Use a sign language app or dictionary  
Some apps allow for basic sign translations (e.g. [Spread the Sign](#)). You can also look up basic signs from their country's sign language. Fingerspelling may be similar between sign languages and can help with names and key words.
- Use the images in this book as a reference. You could also use find relevant pictures online if necessary.
- Be patient and keep a positive, friendly attitude. Remember that kindness is a language understood by all.

# About British Sign Language (BSL)

BSL has its own unique grammar and structure, which differs significantly from spoken and written English. When communicating with someone who uses BSL, it is important to be mindful that direct word-for-word translations may not be effective. Written communication should be clear, concise, and free of complex sentence structures.

## Learning BSL

While formal BSL training is ideal, learning a few basic signs to convey greetings and basic phrases can also make a big difference. Undertaking a deaf awareness course is a good place to start, as it will give an overview of the challenges faced by deaf people as well as an introduction to BSL. Here at MSDP, we offer both:

	<b>Face to face Deaf Awareness courses</b>		<b>Online Deaf Awareness e-learning</b>
You can find out about both on our website: <a href="http://www.msdp.org.uk/deaf-awareness">www.msdp.org.uk/deaf-awareness</a>			

MSDP also provide **BSL courses** from level 1 to 6.

[www.msdp.org.uk/british-sign-language](http://www.msdp.org.uk/british-sign-language)

If you're looking for something less formal then you could try this low cost online course featuring basic BSL tutorials:

[www.british-sign.co.uk/learn-online-british-sign-language-course](http://www.british-sign.co.uk/learn-online-british-sign-language-course)

## Different forms of sign language

Sign language is not universal and not all deaf people use BSL. Different countries and regions have their own distinct sign languages, just like spoken languages. There are over 300 unique sign languages used worldwide. BSL is the primary sign language used by the Deaf community in the UK, but it's not uncommon to meet people who communicate in Irish Sign Language (ISL) and International Sign Language.

There are other forms of communication that you should be aware of. These include:

- **Sign Supported English (SSE)** - follows English grammar but incorporates BSL signs.
- **Makaton** – a simplified system of signs and symbols designed to support spoken language. It is commonly used with children and individuals with communication disabilities.
- **DeafBlind Manual Alphabet** – a form of tactile signing used by people who are both deaf and blind. It involves spelling words into the hand.

### Using Technology to Support Communication

Computers and smartphones can be great tools for bridging communication gaps. Here are some ways technology can assist:

- Video relay services – allow for remote interpreting via video calls.  
[www.relayuk.bt.com](http://www.relayuk.bt.com)
- Speech-to-text apps – convert spoken language into written text in real-time.
- BSL video dictionaries – help users find and understand signs quickly.



### Suggested online resources

#### Commanding Hands

[www.commandinghands.co.uk](http://www.commandinghands.co.uk)

#### BSL Zone

[www.lumotv.co.uk](http://www.lumotv.co.uk)

#### BSL Dictionary

[www.signbsl.com](http://www.signbsl.com)

#### Spread The Sign

[www.spreadthesign.com](http://www.spreadthesign.com)

### Accessing Interpreting Services

For professional communication, it is best to use qualified interpreters where possible. Many organisations provide interpreting services, either free or paid. Local Deaf organisations and charities often provide interpreter directories or booking services. MSDP provide interpreter booking services in the Merseyside area and Northwest of England:

[www.msdp.org.uk/interpreter-booking](http://www.msdp.org.uk/interpreter-booking)

# Accessing NHS healthcare

People who have applied for asylum and are receiving support from the Home Office are entitled to use NHS healthcare services free of charge. This means they can register with a General Practitioner (GP), as well as access hospital and maternity services.

## GP registration

Individuals should register with a local GP practice as soon as possible after arrival in the UK so that they can access healthcare when needed. They should visit a nearby GP surgery and request a registration form. If they need help filling in the form, staff at the practice can book an interpreter if required. **Patients have the right to interpreting services.** While GP practices may ask for proof of identity or address, lack of documentation is not a valid reason to refuse registration.

## HC2 Certificate: Help with health costs

People on low incomes can apply for an HC2 certificate for full financial support with health costs. This covers things like:

- NHS prescriptions
- NHS dental treatment
- Eye tests, glasses and contact lenses
- Help with travel costs to receive NHS treatment (in some cases)

This support is available to people with limited savings and who are on a low income, but not receiving qualifying benefits.

Applications are made using a HC1 form. If successful, they will receive either an HC2 certificate (full help) or HC3 (partial help). Links to the HC1 form can be found here:

[www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/nhs-low-income-scheme-lis/](http://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/nhs-low-income-scheme-lis/)

The image shows a sample HC2 Certificate for full help with health costs. The certificate is titled 'HC2 Certificate for full help with health costs' and includes the following details:

- CHIT NO:** 2-06453212
- Valid from:** 03 October 2014
- Valid until:** 02 October 2015
- FOR:** DECLAN HEAVEN, MARIA HEAVEN
- Address:** Mr D HEAVEN, 71 QUEENS ROAD WEST, LONDON, E13 9PE

The certificate also includes a section titled 'ABOUT THIS CERTIFICATE' which explains the benefits and how to use the certificate. It lists the following benefits:

- free NHS prescriptions
- free NHS dental treatment
- free NHS sight tests
- the full value of a voucher towards the cost of glasses and contact lenses
- free NHS wigs and fabric supports
- refund of necessary costs of travel to receive NHS treatment (please read the note overleaf before you travel)

The certificate also includes a section titled 'IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH US' which provides contact information for the NHS Business Services Authority. It also includes a 'NOTE' section which states that the certificate can only be given to another person with your permission. Finally, it includes a 'HOW TO RENEW YOUR CERTIFICATE' section which provides information on how to renew the certificate.



# Images to support communication

When working with non-BSL and non-English speakers we have found photographs and other graphics to be very helpful aids to communication. On the following pages are a selection of images that we regularly use with clients, grouped by theme.

Below is a list of the topics covered:

**Calendar** Page 8



**Around the town** Page 16



**Time** Page 9



**Places of worship** Page 18



**Support needed** Page 10



**Around the house** Page 19



**Family** Page 11



**Money** Page 21



**Healthcare** Page 12



**Mobile & internet** Page 22



**Transport** Page 13



**Further support** Page 23



**Housing** Page 15



# Calendar (UK)

January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

# Time



AM



PM

# Type of support required

## Finances



## Visa / immigration



## Legal advice



## Accommodation



## Health



## Food





# Family





# Healthcare

## Hospital



## Dentist



## GP surgery



## Pharmacy



## Women's Hospital



## Optician





# Transport

Train



Train station



Bus



Bus stop



Coach



Bus station





# Transport

## Aeroplane



## Airport



## Bicycle



## Walk



## Car



## Taxi





# Housing

House



Flat



Hotel



Hostel



Homeless



SERCO housing





# Around the town

Library



School



Job Centre



Advice centre



Cash machine



Bank



## Around the town

Post Office



POST  
OFFICE

Foodbank



foodbank

Supermarket



Iceland

home bargains



Halal shop / restaurant



Liverpool City Council



Photo: Anthony Parkes, Wikimedia, CC2.0  
[creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en)



# Places of worship

Church



Mosque



Synagogue



Gurdwara



Temple



Temple





## Around the house

Microwave, kettle & toaster



Radiator



Boiler



Fridge



Washing machine



Cooker



# Around the house

Sofa



Shower, toilet & sink



Tv & computer

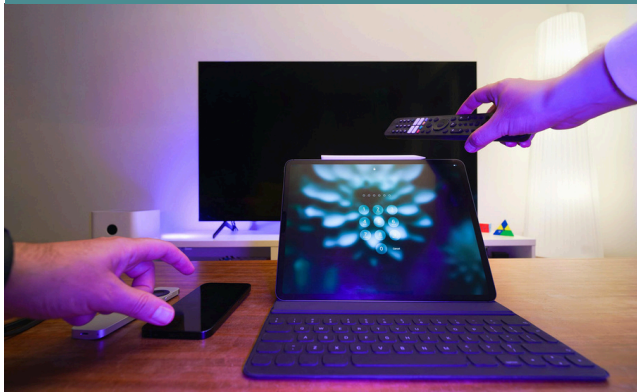


Table & chairs



Bed



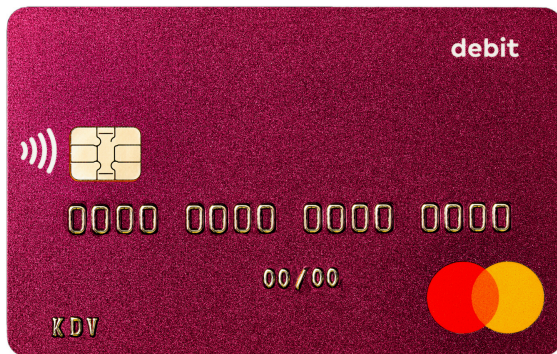
Cot





# Money

## Debit / credit card



## Contactless payment



1p



2p



5p



10p



20p



50p



£1



£2



£50



£20



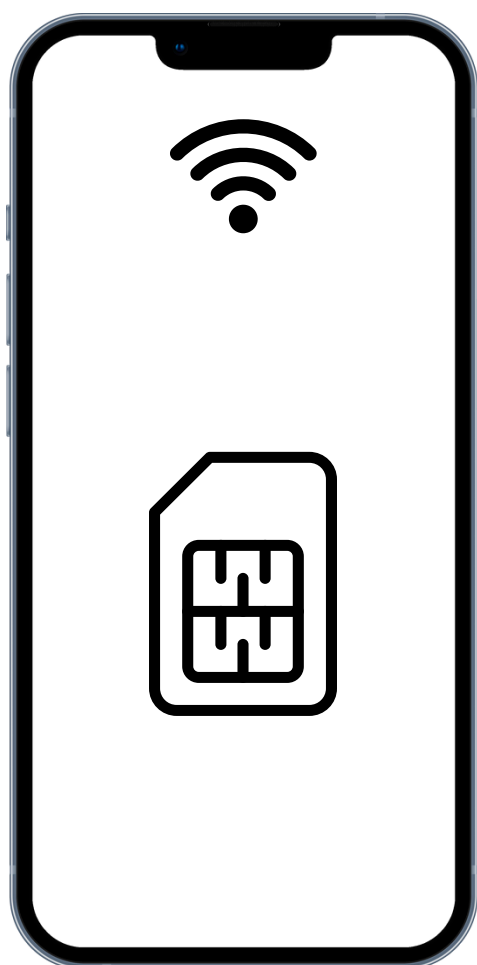
£10



£5



## Mobile & internet



### Cheaper Mobile & Internet Providers

**Lyca** Mobile

**SMARTY**  
Simple, honest mobile

**giffgaff**

**LEBARA**

### Useful apps & websites

#### Travel



#### Support & advice



#### Health & emergency



#### Communication



#### Free food & household items



## Further Support in Merseyside

Here at MSDP we are here to support anyone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Merseyside. However, if we are unable to help with a particular issue we will do our best to refer to someone who can help.

### Useful contacts

#### British Deaf Association

Provides community support, legal advocacy, and initiatives to empower Deaf individuals in education, employment, and public life.

[bda.org.uk](http://bda.org.uk)



#### Deafness Resource Centre

Provides advocacy and other services to support deaf asylum seekers, migrants and refugees.

[deafnessresourcecentre.org](http://deafnessresourcecentre.org)

[enquiries@deafnessresourcecentre.org](mailto:enquiries@deafnessresourcecentre.org)



#### Migrant Help

Supports asylum seekers, refugees, and victims of human trafficking by providing advice, guidance, and assistance to help them navigate the asylum system, access essential services, and integrate into society.

[www.migranthelpuk.org](http://www.migranthelpuk.org)



#### Liverpool City Council Directory

You can find a detailed list of organisations in Liverpool that support refugees, asylum seekers and migrants on the Liverpool City Council website. Their directory includes organisations providing a wide range of support, including: legal advice, food assistance, training opportunities, mental health services, social activities, and much more.

Scan the QR code or go to:

[www.liverpool.gov.uk/communities-and-safety/our-liverpool-refugee-and-migrant-service/directory-of-support](http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/communities-and-safety/our-liverpool-refugee-and-migrant-service/directory-of-support)

You can also contact Liverpool City Council by going to:

<https://liverpool.gov.uk/contact-us/contact-a-service>



## About MSDP

We support Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people across Merseyside in a variety of different ways:

- Support service
- Duty service
- Community clubs and events
- Equipment and aids
- Interpreters
- British Sign Language courses and Deaf awareness training

Visit our website to find out more: [msdp.org.uk](https://msdp.org.uk)

You can find out about our online Deaf Awareness training by going to: [deafaware.msdp.org.uk](https://deafaware.msdp.org.uk)

### Work with someone who could use our support?

Please get in touch using the details below:

## Contact details

### Head Office

Merseyside Society for Deaf People  
Queens Drive Retail Park  
West Derby  
Liverpool  
L13 0D

**Telephone:** 0151 228 0888

**Email:** [reception@msdp.org.uk](mailto:reception@msdp.org.uk)

### Wirral Office

Wirral Society of the Blind & Partially Sighted,  
Ashville Lodge  
Ashville Road  
Birkenhead  
Wirral  
CH41 8AU

**Telephone:** 0151 652 8877



## Notes

## Notes