

Two Views of Deafness

Outline by Chris Wixtrom

1st View: Deafness as Pathology

With this perspective, a person might:

Define deafness as a *pathological condition* (a defect, or a handicap) which distinguishes *abnormal* deaf persons from normal hearing persons.

Deny, downplay or hide evidence of deafness.

Seek a "cure" for deafness; focus on ameliorating the effects of the "auditory disability" or "impairment."

Give much attention to the use of hearing aids and other devices that enhance auditory perception and/or focus on speech. Examples: Amplifiers, tactile and computer-aided speech devices, cue systems. . . .

Place much emphasis on speech and speechreading ("oral" skills); avoid sign and other communication methods which are deemed "inferior."

Promote the use of auditory-based communication modes; frown upon the use of modes which are primarily visual.

Describe sign language as inferior to spoken language.

View spoken language as the most natural language for all persons, including the deaf.

Make mastery of spoken language a central educational aim.

Support socialization of deaf persons with hearing persons. Frown upon deaf/deaf interaction and deaf/deaf marriages.

Regard "the normal hearing person" as the best role model.

Regard professional involvement with the deaf as "helping the deaf" to "overcome their handicap" and to "live in the hearing world."

Neither accept nor support a separate "deaf culture."

2nd View: Deafness as a Difference

With this perspective, a person might:

Define deafness as merely a *difference*, a *characteristic* which distinguishes *normal* deaf persons from normal hearing persons. Recognize that deaf people are a linguistic and cultural minority.

Openly acknowledge deafness.

Emphasize the abilities of deaf persons.

Give much attention to issues of communication access for deaf persons through visual devices and services. Examples: telecommunication devices, captioning devices, light signal devices, interpreters. . . .

Encourage the development of all communication modes, including—but not limited to—speech.

Strongly emphasize the use of vision as a positive, efficient alternative to the auditory channel.

View sign language as equal to spoken language.

View sign language as the most natural language for people who are born deaf.

In education, focus on subject matter, rather than on a method of communication. Work to expand all communication skills.

Support socialization within the deaf community as well as within the larger community.

Regard successful deaf adults as positive role models for deaf children.

Regard professional involvement with the deaf as "working with the deaf" to "provide access to the same rights and privileges that hearing people enjoy."

Respect, value and support the language and culture of deaf people.