



Deaf Culture

Deaf culture describes the social beliefs, behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values, and shared institutions of communities that are affected by [deafness](#) and which use [sign languages](#) as the main means of communication. When used as a cultural label especially within the culture, the word *deaf* is often written with a capital *D* and referred to as "big D Deaf" in speech and sign. When used as a label for the [audiological](#) condition, it is written with a lower case *d*.

Members of the deaf community tend to view [deafness](#) as a difference in human experience rather than a [disability](#).

The community may include family members of deaf people and sign-language interpreters who identify with deaf culture and does not automatically include all people who are deaf or hard of hearing. As one author writes, "it is not the extent of hearing loss that defines a member of the deaf community but the individual's own sense of identity and resultant actions." As with all social groups that a person chooses to belong to, a person is a member of the deaf community if he or she "identifies him/herself as a member of the deaf community, and other members accept that person as a part of the community."

Deaf culture is recognized under article 30, paragraph 4 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which states that "Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture."

Jack Gannon, a professor at Gallaudet University, said this about [deaf culture](#). "Deaf culture is a set of learned behaviours and perceptions that shape the values and norms of deaf people based on their shared or common experiences." Some doctors believe that being deaf makes a person more social. Dr. Bill Vicar, from ASL University, shared his experiences as a deaf person, "[deaf people] tend to congregate around the kitchen table rather than the living room sofa... our good-byes take nearly forever, and our hellos often consist of serious hugs. When two of us meet for the first time we tend to exchange detailed biographies." Deaf culture is not about contemplating what deaf people cannot do and how to fix their problems. That is called a "pathological view of the deaf". Instead deaf people celebrate what they can do. There is a strong sense of unity between deaf people as they share their experiences of suffering through a similar struggle. This celebration creates a unity between even deaf strangers. Dr. Bill Vicars expresses the power of this bond when stating, "if given the chance to become hearing most [deaf people] would choose to remain deaf." There is more to deaf culture than meets the eye and has to be "experienced" to full comprehend it.