

# Living with deafblindness: Communication methods

There are many different ways that deafblind people communicate, rather than one standard method. Some common communication methods are below.

## Speech

Many people who are deafblind can talk and can hear clear speech. Advances in technology means that those who would have previously relied on lip reading can now hear through hearing aids and portable listening devices.

## Lip reading

Lip reading is a method of identifying words by watching the shape of someone's mouth when they talk.

## British Sign Language (BSL)

A visual communications method that uses hand gestures instead of spoken words. If you use BSL and your sight worsens then you may want to use tactile sign language or 'Hands On' BSL which involves you feeling the movements of the signers hands.

## Signed English

Signed English borrows signs from BSL, but uses the grammar and sentence structure of the English language.

## Makaton or Key Word Signing

Another visual language using signs and symbols. It is often used with children and adults with learning disabilities as a simplified and accessible signed communication.

## Tracking

If you have some usable vision then you may want to follow signs by holding the signer's forearm or wrist and using your eyes to follow the signs visually. Having the connection of using vision and touch together means the signs stay within your visual frame and are effectively 'tracked'.

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## Hands on signing/Co-active signing

A tactile derivative of BSL where you gently place your hands on top of your communication partner's hands to feel the movements of the signs.

## Visual frame signing

If you have a reduced field of vision your communication partner signs (using BSL or another form of sign language) within a smaller area to ensure all of their signs stay within your field of vision.

## Deafblind Manual

A tactile communications method where individual letters are signed onto your hand so that you can spell words. This is often used by people who have little or no sight or hearing.

## Block

Probably the easiest deafblind tactile language to express – the block alphabet uses English capital letters, drawn onto your palm.

## Tadoma

Tadoma is a way of receiving communication by placing your hands on someone's throat, lips or cheeks. Practiced users will be able to identify words by feeling lip movements and vibrations.

## Braille

A tactile writing system originally developed with embossed paper, but now accessible through refreshable braille displays. Each letter is symbolised by a series of raised dots that you can feel with your fingertips.

## Moon

Another tactile writing system which is rarely used these days. Its patterns follow a more visually recognisable English letter formation.

## Objects of reference

This is less of a communication system and more of a means to refer to an activity or event. For example, a parent of a deafblind child may use a sponge to tell their child that it's bath time. Later that child may develop the understanding that sponge means bath but flannel means shower. The parent can then offer a choice; flannel (shower) or sponge (bath).

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