

# TRANSCRIPT

## Effective Communications with Law Enforcement Officers (Police)

### Question 11: Hard of Hearing Individuals

#### **Michael Baer, Emergency and Public Communication Access Program Coordinator**

Good. Up until this point, we've been talking about Deaf Culture and sign language. But we have a community of Hard of Hearing people who do not sign. They speak. They may have lost their hearing as a result of age or lost their hearing later in life. Suppose a Hard of Hearing person tries to speak to a police officer but their speech is unclear. This could lead to a communication breakdown. How do you suggest a police officer handle that situation? During emotional or stressful times, a Hard of Hearing person may speak very quickly and police officers could misunderstand what he/she is trying to say. What would you suggest doing in those situations?

#### **Chief Ted Baran, Director of Campus Security at Gallaudet University**

It's important that we don't forget the Hard of Hearing Community too. They have different challenges too. One of the biggest things that I try to emphasize with police is what you get from a Hard of Hearing person may not be the reality or be exactly what you think. Like, for example, police officers might assume that a person who can speak can also hear. They may equate a person's ability to speak with their ability to hear. So, sometimes a situation involving a Hard of Hearing person can be worse or more sensitive because there are misunderstandings that can happen as a result of assuming a Hard of Hearing person can hear more than they are really able to. So it's important for Hard of Hearing people to identify themselves as such. They can point to their ears, their hearing aid or their cochlear implant. It's important to show officers that to identify yourself. Once the officer sees that, you know many officers rely on the visual, then mutual understanding is established. And again, pointing to your ears. Many Hard of Hearing people can speak and that's fine. Use whatever speech skills you have to resolve the issue at the time. But, it's important on our end, and what I do is emphasize to officers, "Don't assume." Don't assume a person can read lips. Because I always say reading lips is less than 30 percent on the mouth and folks will not understand. Also, if the lights are dim or if it's nighttime, people won't be able to see. Also, officers do use flashlights that shine onto a person's face. It's important to tell the officer, "I can't see, would you mind moving your flashlight?" I advise officers, once a person identifies as Deaf or Hard of Hearing, to take the flashlight and hold it upwards against their chest, so their face can be seen by a Deaf or Hard of Hearing person. That's advice I give to officers. Really, don't be afraid to ask an officer to move their flashlight or ask them to move into better

light so a Hard of Hearing person can see everything, not just their mouth, but their expressions. It's important to see all of that in total. If necessary a Hard of Hearing person can opt to write back and forth with the officer or use their iPhone to type their messages to one another. Use any technology, any devices, anything you can to establish good communication from the start. Identify yourself as Deaf or Hard of Hearing and that will open the door to a positive interaction.

