

A GUIDE FOR FUNERAL HOMES ASSISTING FAMILY MEMBERS WHO HAVE HEARING LOSS

***Utah State Office of Rehabilitation
DIVISION OF SERVICES
TO THE
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING***

The Need:

People who have hearing loss need assistance to understand what is being said when they attend funerals. Imagine sitting through a funeral of a loved one without understanding what the speakers are saying. Everyone needs the closure that funeral services provide. Losing a loved one is the most difficult challenge of life. Not having simple communication accommodations at funerals complicates the grief process for people with hearing loss. Statistics estimate that 10% of the population has some degree of hearing loss, which would be 255,000 people in Utah. [This varies from 10% to 20% depending on the source] However, the incidence of hearing loss increases with age to the extent that one out of three people over age 65 is hard of hearing. [Some sources say as high as 50%] These are people with hearing loss that want to attend funerals but often do not because of the difficulty of trying to understand what is said without accommodations. People with hearing loss use various methods to improve their access to communication. Most individuals who are **Hard of Hearing** greatly benefit from the use of **assistive listening devices**. Hearing aids amplify everything, the noise the listener wants to hear as well as the background noise he or she does not want to hear. Assistive listening devices use a microphone placed directly in front of the speaker with a transmitter to send the sound to those with corresponding receivers. This reduces the background noise while amplifying the speaker's voice.

Some people, however, do not benefit from hearing aids or assistive listening devices. They have **little usable hearing** and need **Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART)** captioning. CART is provided by a court reporter using a steno machine and laptop computer. It makes the full funeral service available visually in written English.

Other individuals who are **Deaf** prefer **interpreters**. (Utah law requires businesses to use certified interpreters.) There are three different kinds of interpreters:

- American Sign Language (ASL)
- Oral (lipreading)
- Cued Speech

To know which type of accommodation is needed, ask the individual(s) with hearing loss.

The Requirement:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers **communication accessibility** in places of public accommodation, including funeral homes. The National Funeral Directors Association states that “All funeral homes must take steps to make facilities accessible to members of the public with disabilities. The public accommodation provisions of the ADA require businesses to make reasonable attempts to provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy the same level of service provided to individuals without disabilities.”

(Taken from the National Funeral Directors Association web site, www.nfda.org, “Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Summary.”)

The Utah Office of Legislative Research and general Counsel also states that mortuaries are included under the definition of “public accommodations” (ADA Sections 42 USCS § 12182 eg seq. and 42 USCS § 12181). The ADA requires auxiliary aids and services must be provided unless such actions would result in an undue burden, defined as a significant difficulty or expense. Costs of the accommodation can be passed on to consumers across the board, but not specifically passed on to the individuals who use them. A tax credit exists to help with the expenses of accommodating communication access. [Check KY tax laws.]

(For more information, please visit the National Funeral Directors Association website at www.nfda.org.)

The Solutions:

Routinely ask families if they are aware of individuals with special [communication] needs who may be attending the funeral services. *(Taken from NFDA ADA Compliance Summary.)* Family members may be experiencing shock and lack the ability to think clearly enough to advocate for themselves at this time.

Accommodations may be needed at the time of planning funeral arrangements when Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals are involved as well as at the funeral and cemetery. Some individuals who are Deaf may not have a good understanding of written documents and will need an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter. Individuals who are Hard of Hearing may just need you to be conscious of their hearing loss by speaking clearly in a quiet place. You may also offer assistive listening devices and write down important details during the planning process. The most common communication accommodations are assistive listening systems, interpreter services, and real-time captioning.

Assistive listening systems: This technology uses a transmitter plugged into a sound system or connected to its own microphone, which is placed in close proximity to the speaker. The signal is transmitted to a receiver, which the listener can adjust to the volume needed for his or her individual hearing sensitivity – much like a radio receiving transmission from a station. Multiple receivers can be used as needed. In Utah, many places of worship are already equipped with this technology, so funeral directors need only assure that the system is turned on and receivers (and batteries) are available when funerals are held there. In other locations, the transmitter and microphone would also need to be provided.

CART: Communication Access Real-Time Translation is provided by court reporters that turn the spoken word into written text. It can be provided for one or two people using a laptop monitor or for many people by connecting additional monitors (or TV screens) or by projecting the words onto a screen positioned beside the speaker.

Interpreters: Deaf individuals who are skilled in American Sign Language (ASL), the natural language of Deaf individuals, need ASL interpreters. American Sign Language has its own grammar and syntax; it does not follow English word order. Native ASL users may lack the English skills necessary to benefit from CART written notes.

Oral interpreters mouth a speaker's words silently for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. This method of interpreting assists with speech reading for people who were taught oral communication instead of sign language.

Cued Speech interpreters supplement lipreading with a system of phonetic visual cues.

People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing do use the telephone, and most have the kind of phone service that works best for them. Most people with hearing loss simply use an amplified phone or a captioned telephone. Others prefer email or cell phone text communication. Others may use a TTY or video relay service. Inquire of them the best way to contact them to finalize funeral arrangements.

Resources:

The Division of Services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Sanderson Community Center and Southern Utah Program) is a state agency under the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation. If you would like further information about obtaining an interpreter, CART provider, or borrowing an assistive listening system, please contact:

Sanderson Community Center of the
Deaf and Hard of Hearing
801-263-4860 (Front Desk)
801-263-4886 (Administration)
www.deafservices.utah.gov
jrhill@utah.gov
emccormick@utah.gov
smadams@utah.gov