

Common Functional Loss Indicators for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumers



The following are common areas of functional loss related to hearing loss at varying levels. “Deaf” is used to indicate consumers who use American Sign Language as their primary language. “Hard of Hearing” is used to indicate consumers who have hearing loss but use spoken language as their preferred mode of communication. As with any client, VR staff must consider the effect of the disability on a case-by-case basis and ensure there is documentation of the functional loss on file. That documentation may be objective or anecdotal, but it must be present. Clients with hearing loss may not have functional impediments in every category, but staff members are advised to consider all categories before making an assessment of each client’s functional loss for eligibility determination.

Communication

Conversation may be limited to single words or short phrases

- This is generally most true for Deaf consumers who have minimal language skills — difficulty communicating in any language, including ASL. This can also apply to HOH consumers; it is a common response to managing communication anxiety and stress.

Do not readily understand others

- This is self-explanatory. Don’t overlook this issue with HOH clients. Employers and coworkers frequently assume that HOH clients’ communication ability (e.g., speech) is understandable and therefore their receptive skills (e.g., language comprehension) are within the socially normal range.

Not readily understood by others

- Some Deaf and HOH clients have significant speech impediments related to their hearing loss or to coexisting disabilities.

Speech is rambling or illogical

- This may be related to the above in HOH cases. Also frequently an issue for those Deaf people with minimal language skills (MLS Deaf) and/or minimal exposure to the world of work.

Talk and interrupt excessively

- This is frequently an issue with HOH people who seek to control the communication environment so they do not have to disclose their hearing loss and/or face rejection by Hearing peers/supervisors.

Unable to communicate verbally

- This is self-explanatory.

Unable to converse via telephone

- This is self-explanatory.

Unable to follow written instructions or interpret written materials

- Especially true for Deaf consumers; the average reading level of a high school graduate who is Deaf is estimated

between second- and fourth-grade level. Math and spelling skills are likewise less than would be expected given completion of high school.

- Generally most true for Deaf consumers who have minimal language skills — difficulty communicating in any language, including ASL. May also apply to HOH consumers, as the polar opposite response to managing stress and communication anxiety.



Interpersonal skills

Insufficient psych/social interaction for participation in desired activities

- Deaf consumers generally have not learned about corporate culture, workplace etiquette, etc., and often presume they are being talked about by their Hearing peers and supervisors. They also frequently misinterpret nonverbal communication (facial expressions, body language) or are considered to be blunt or rude due to cultural differences between the Deaf and Hearing worlds. HOH consumers frequently are presumed to have heard clearly when they actually did not, or they did not hear the complete message. This causes friction when their response is incongruous or inappropriate.

Isolation/withdrawal from coworkers

- This is self-explanatory. It is generally directly related to communication issues or style.

Spotty, intermittent work history

- **Very** common for Deaf consumers, especially those who are long-term SSI/DI recipients. For HOH consumers, this issue is generally centered on communication problems that were not or poorly accommodated.

Unable to determine appropriate social response to others

- More prevalent with Deaf consumers but seen in both groups. Deaf consumers miss out on incidental learning, so often do not understand corporate culture and workplace etiquette without specific and intensive instruction on those issues. HOH people may become overwhelmed and “melt down” on days when their communication skills are being tested or if their hearing ability fluctuates.

Unable to understand/demonstrate interaction or behavior appropriate to work site

- Many Deaf and some HOH people have not been exposed to or learned the social and behavioral expectations of corporate culture (e.g., punctuality, taking breaks, gossiping at work, requesting time off, etc.)

Mobility

Unable to use public transportation

- Many Deaf consumers have difficulty reading or are unable to read bus schedules and drivers' manuals due to reading level, language acquisition and lack of independent living skills.
- Deaf and HOH people also frequently miss broadcast announcements at airports, information, questions and directions from bus and train drivers, etc.

Balance or gross motor coordination issues impede preparation or participation in work or training

- Some Deaf consumers have difficulty with balance (e.g., Meniere's disease) or require point-to-point transportation for physical safety reasons.



Self care

History of poor decision making or unaware of consequences of behavior

- This is particularly seen with young Deaf people, but is something that can apply to both genders and any age group. Deaf people with minimal language skills (MLS Deaf) are particularly vulnerable.
- Many Deaf and some HOH people have not been exposed to or learned the social and behavioral expectations of corporate culture (e.g., punctuality, taking breaks, gossiping at work, appropriate attire, requesting time off, etc.)

Require assistance getting around community

- Some Deaf consumers have difficulty with balance (e.g., Meniere's disease) or require point-to-point transportation for physical safety reasons.

Unable to plan travel to work

- Many Deaf consumers have difficulty or are unable to read bus schedules and drivers' manuals due to reading level, language acquisition and lack of independent living skills. Map reading can also be a significant barrier.

Unable to read street signs or bus schedules

- Many Deaf consumers have difficulty or are unable to read bus schedules and drivers' manuals due to reading level, language acquisition and lack of independent living skills.

Unable to manage money or finances

- Deaf and HOH people are frequently the recipients of "help" from well-meaning parents, family members and friends. They may never have learned to manage a bank account, pay bills and make budgets. This can cause significant problems, especially if the consumer is an SSI/DI recipient who begins working and cannot manage the income-reporting process with SSA.



Self-direction

Cognitive deficits impairing work quality or productivity

- Quality and productivity are especially impaired if work setting is noisy (HOH) or has a lot of visual stimuli (Deaf); this

is generally not due to traditional cognitive deficits, but due to sensory deficits overloading cognitive abilities.

Work skills

Difficulty learning new tasks

- This is generally due to language barriers, reading comprehension and the need for ASL interpreters.

Reading, spelling or math proficiency at or below 5th grade level

- Especially true for Deaf consumers; the average reading level of a high school graduate who is Deaf is estimated between second- and fourth-grade level. Math and spelling skills are likewise less than would be expected of Hearing consumers who have completed high school.

Require accommodations or rehab tech

- For Deaf consumers, this may include longer training periods, ASL interpreters, note takers, tutoring, captioned films/videos, etc.
- For HOH consumers, it may include preferential seating, smaller class size, tutoring, note takers, CART (real-time captioning), captioned films/videos, FM systems and other assistive listening devices, etc.

Work tolerance

Lack physical or emotional stamina to perform essential functions of job

- This is frequently an issue for Oral Deaf (who rely on speech-reading and other visually based supports but not ASL) and HOH consumers (who must expend great amounts of energy to effectively understand and be understood).

- Work tolerance is especially a challenge for those with vestibular issues (e.g., chronic vertigo), those with tumors on the auditory nerve (e.g., neurofibromatosis) and those with additional disabilities.