

How to Say the Right Thing

999 BSL Wording Guidelines

Dear stakeholders,

We want you to benefit from your commitment to the BSL community and it is therefore very important that you are aware of the need for care and precision whilst drafting and publishing your publicity materials and/or social media content, especially when talking about members of the community that we work with - deaf BSL users. There are things we think all our stakeholders should be aware of while they promote the 999 BSL service. I hope you find the next part of this letter useful.

When most people see or hear the word “deaf”, they immediately think of this in a medical/health context: an impairment, a disability, a missing sense and/or a deprivation. Actually, one in seven people in the UK has a hearing loss. They generally identify themselves as hard of hearing, deafened or even deaf. They generally are English speakers and are comfortable communicating through spoken or written language and most may not know any sign language. They use other assistive communication devices such as telephone amplifiers, text phones, emails and/or Text Relay services when they wish to contact you. They may want you to activate the induction loop (if it is installed) when they visit your premises as they hear more clearly through this with their hearing aids.

Deaf BSL users are a distinct language group with its own form of communication.

You might be surprised to discover that they don't identify themselves primarily as disabled and often see themselves more belonging to a language minority with their own cultural differences from that of their peers in this country. They don't see their “lack of hearing” as a barrier in their lives apart from that of communication - in short the BSL community face a problem if the service they wish to use is not available in BSL. It is just like how you would feel in a foreign country where no one knows English and all services are not available in English.

It is worth being aware that there is nothing worse you can do to a BSL user than call them hearing impaired or a person with a hearing disability. We encounter many Disability Trainers and Consultants who may not understand this fact or through their own ideals or for the sake of convenience, prefer to include deaf people in the generic disability movement.

Unfortunately, this often leads to well-meaning organisations including these inappropriate terms and classifications within their communications, and therefore running the risk of alienating those they wish to include. It devalues that company's efforts and investments.

By introducing them as deaf BSL users, you become an ambassador of British Sign Language, one of the indigenous languages in the UK among Welsh, Scottish Gaelic

and Cornish. You will gain their trust by showing respect for their language and understanding where they are coming from.

By promoting deaf BSL users an access to 999 BSL, you are empowering them. This is a huge step in accessibility for people who up until now have been unable to call the emergency authorities, that it is therefore important that the language or terminology used should not disempower the BSL user.

We know that there is still much to do in terms of spreading awareness of this linguistic and cultural minority. That’s why we have put together a list of recommended terminology, to help you say the right thing when you choose wording for the, if applicable, web page, write a press release or promote the service.

Terms to avoid	Recommended terminology
hearing impaired people	Deaf or Hard of Hearing people who use British Sign Language (BSL)
people with hearing loss	
people with a hearing disability	Deaf or Hard of Hearing British Sign Language (BSL) users
people with hearing difficulties	Deaf or Hard of Hearing people whose preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL)
deaf and dumb	
deaf-mute	Deaf/ deaf
signer	Registered British Sign Language interpreter
support	BSL interpreter
help	translate from BSL to English
rely on sign language	relay from BSL to English
	opportunity/choice to use BSL

Thank you for your support of the BSL community.

Best wishes,
999 BSL Project Team