

Support for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Survivors of Domestic Abuse



September 10, 2026

OneOp.org/learn/160150/



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Supporting your work so you can better support military families.



Who We Are

A DOW & Cooperative Extension partnership supporting professionals who serve military families.

Our Mission

Strengthening military family service providers through accessible, research-informed learning.

What We Offer

Free, online professional development through webinars, podcasts, courses, and more.



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Visit the event page to download a copy of the webinar slides and any additional resources.



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Learning Objectives

Webinar Overview

This webinar explores the unique barriers Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors may face when seeking help, including communication access, isolation, systemic inequities, and limited accessible resources.

①

Identify community resources and accessibility practices that promote equitable and survivor-centered support services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

②

Identify at least three barriers Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors may encounter when accessing domestic abuse and family violence services.

③

Describe at least three culturally sensitive and trauma-informed communication strategies when supporting Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients.

④

Demonstrate understanding of effective safety planning considerations specific to Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors experiencing abuse.

Today's Presenter

Karina Mitchell

Program Director
DEAF DOVE

About

With over eight years of experience in the mental health and social services field, she has worked as a mental health therapist, advocate, crisis counselor, and community leader.



Support for DDBDDHH Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Presented By: **Karina Mitchell**



Deaf Overcoming Violence through Empowerment

Welcome & Housekeeping

Welcome

- Accessibility features available
- Questions can be submitted via the chat-pod feature.

Content warning: There will be discussion of domestic abuse/domestic violence (DV) and family violence.

Note: Domestic abuse is DOW-aligned language.

Agenda

- Understanding the Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and Hard of Hearing (DDBDDHH) community/culture
- Barriers to services
- Trauma-informed communication
- Safety planning
- Resources & best practices
- Questions & discussion



Learning Objective 1

Identify community resources and accessibility practices that promote equitable and survivor-centered support services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

What is DOVE?

Nonprofit 501(c)3 established in 2000 with 5 Deaf staff dedicated to serving victims/survivors of abuse in the Colorado community:

- Deaf
- DeafBlind
- Hard of Hearing
- Deaf Disabled
- Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs)

DOVE Services

All direct advocacy services are free & available 24/7 regardless of:

- Age
- Race
- Gender/sex
- Religious affiliation
- Nationality
- Income level



Programs & Services

Direct Advocacy Services

- Hotline & emotional support
- Legal & medical accompaniment

Survivor Resiliency Program

- Survivor workshops & retreats
- Survivor therapy groups in collaboration with National Deaf Therapy

Technical Assistance

- Trauma-informed & cultural awareness trainings
- Shelter accommodation assessments
- ADA Loan kits

Community Education & Outreach

- Educational community events for DDBDDHH
- Youth advocacy & prevention



Deaf Culture

Deaf Culture 101

Deaf culture is more than hearing loss.

- Shared language and experiences
- Strong community connections
- Visual communication norms
- Unique history and identity

Important reminder: Many Deaf individuals view themselves as members of a cultural and linguistic minority rather than individuals with a disability.



Rizqi Baraka/Adobe Stock, file #2033191731



DDBDDHH

Acronym: Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, Orally Deaf

Is the deaf and hard of hearing one community or multiple communities? DDBDDHH captures the general community.

- This acronym includes the spectrum of different groups included in this community.
- Each group has unique/individual's experience/referring to varying levels of hearing.



Fizkes/Adobe Stock, file #5 203557 01

Understanding the Deaf Community

Deaf and hard of hearing communities are diverse.

Not all individuals:

- Use American Sign Language (ASL)
- Identify with Deaf culture
- Have the same communication preferences
- Have equal access to information



Communication

Deaf and hard of hearing communities are diverse.

Communication methods:

- ASL
- Signed English
- Spoken English
- Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) Captioning
- Text-based communication



Language Deprivation & Information Access

Understanding Language Deprivation

Many deaf individuals:

- Were born to hearing families
- Did not receive early language access
- Experienced delayed exposure to ASL
- Received incomplete information growing up



Understanding Impact of Language Deprivation

Impact:

- Increased vulnerability to abuse
- Limited understanding of healthy relationships
- Challenges navigating systems
- Delayed access to safety information



Data on Childhood Language Deprivation

- More than **90% of deaf children** are born to hearing parents.
- About **40% of parents** use ASL at home with their Deaf children.
- Research shows **70% of DDBDDHH children** don't have access to language support. And it's greater for Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) deaf children.

(NIDCD, 2024)



Resources for Understanding Language Deprivation

- Boston University, The Brink, [Language Acquisition](#) | Article
- NIH NIDCD, [Quick Statistics About Hearing, Balance, & Dizziness](#) | Find more on the percentage of Deaf children born to Hearing parents
- National Association of the Deaf (NAD), [Language Deprivation](#) | Knowledge Hub



Find Additional Resources linked on the webinar event page!



Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can include:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual violence
- Financial abuse
- Stalking
- Technology-facilitated abuse



Domestic Abuse in the Deaf Community

Deaf-specific tactics:

- Refusing interpreting services
- Monitoring communication devices
- Controlling transportation
- Withholding information
- Preventing contact with Deaf community



Military-Connected Survivors

Additional challenges:

- Frequent relocations
- Isolation from support networks
- Dependence on military systems
- Concerns about career impact
- Fear of retaliation
- Communication challenges or delays
- Limited accessible services on installations



Resource: DODI 6400.06, *Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Abuse Involving Military and Certain Affiliated Personnel*



Learning Objective 2

Identify at least three barriers Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors may encounter when accessing domestic violence and family violence services.

Barriers to Response

Barrier #1

Common challenges:

- Lack of qualified interpreters
- No captioning available
- Reliance on family members to interpret
- Limited staff training
- Telephone-only services

Impact:

- Miscommunication
- Safety concerns
- Reduced trust
- Delayed reporting



Barrier #2

Isolation may be greater for deaf survivors.

- Small community networks
- Geographic barriers
- Transportation challenges
- Fewer accessible services
- Limited Deaf-specific resources

Isolation is also used by abusers as a control tactic.



zenzen/Adobe Stock, file #305147611



Barrier #3

Survivors may encounter:

- Audism
- Discrimination
- Lack of accessible information
- Inadequate accommodations
- Professionals unfamiliar with Deaf culture

Result: Many survivors stop seeking help after negative experiences.



Bliss/Adobe Stock, file #846436206



Audism and Bias

What is audism?

The belief that hearing people or spoken language are superior.

Examples:

- Assuming someone can lip read
- Speaking to the interpreter instead of the survivor
- Assuming Deaf individuals lack capacity
- Excluding Deaf individuals from decisions



Learning Objective 3

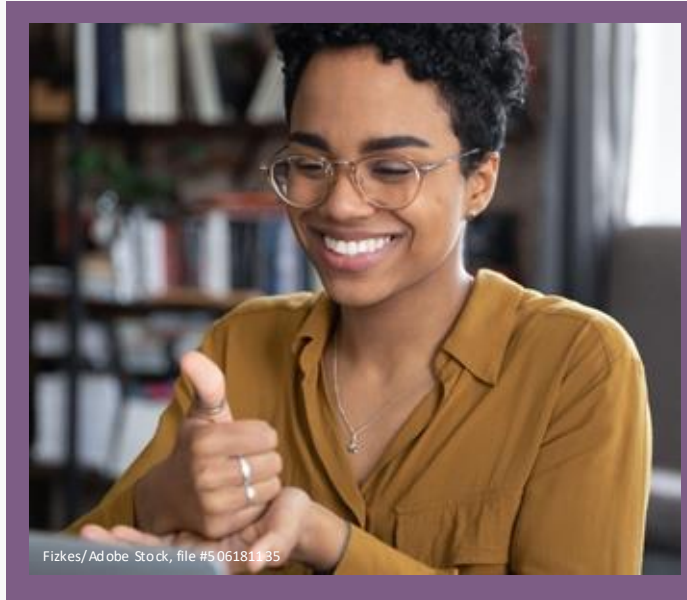
Describe at least three culturally sensitive and trauma-informed communication strategies when supporting Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients.

Communication Strategies

Trauma-Informed Approaches

Key principles:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Cultural Humility



Ask Yourself: "How can I make this service more accessible and survivor-centered?"



Ask, Don't Assume

Ask:

- What communication method do you prefer?
- Do you need an interpreter?
- Do you need paper and pen/white boards?
- Would captions be helpful?
- How can we communicate safely?

Every survivor's needs are different.



Use Qualified Interpreters

Avoid using:

- ✗ Family members
- ✗ Children
- ✗ Friends

Use:

- ✓ Qualified interpreters
- ✓ Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs)
when appropriate



Finding Qualified Interpreters

Interpreters are based on state access, not nationwide.

- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
- To seek qualified interpreters (depending on state by state):
 - Ensure the search is for an ASL Interpreter or Deaf Interpreter.
 - When in contact – let them know the simple context, plan ahead, and let them know what kind of settings (virtual/face to face).
- Seek guidance from your FAP manager to determine how to access funding to secure interpreting resources, as this varies by Service and installation.



Creating Accessible Communication

Provide:

- Use plain language
- Visual information
- Written summaries
- Accessible websites
- Captioned videos



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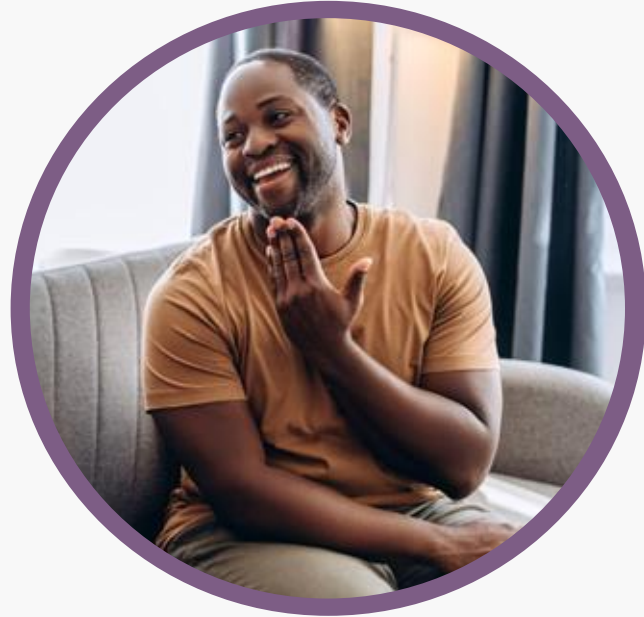
Accessibility benefits everyone.



Practices for Building Trust

- Be transparent.
- Follow through on commitments.
- Respect communication preferences.
- Validate experiences.
- Avoid rushing conversations.

Trust often takes time to develop.



Maria Vitkovska/Adobe Stock, file #1035557224



Learning Objective 4

Demonstrate understanding of effective safety planning considerations specific to Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors experiencing abuse.

Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment Considerations

Ask about:

- Communication monitoring
- Technology abuse
- Interpreter misuse
- Community isolation
- Access to transportation
- Military-related concerns

Traditional risk assessments may miss Deaf-specific risks.



Safety Planning

Safety Planning for Deaf Survivors

How will the survivor:

- Contact emergency services?
- Receive emergency alerts?
- Communicate during emergencies?
- Access transportation?
- Reach support networks?



Fedrelena/Adobe Stock, file #430961076



Deaf-Specific Safety Planning

Safety planning strategies:

- Text-based emergency contacts
- Visual alert systems
- Safe communication devices
- Backup interpreters
- Community support networks
- Accessible shelter options



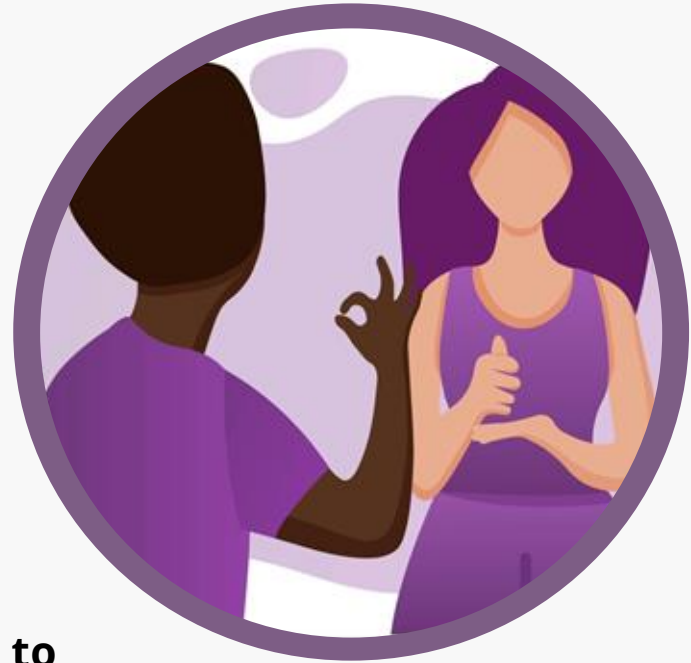
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What Do Survivors Need?

Survivors need:

- To be believed
- Accessible communication
- Respect
- Choices
- Safety
- Empowerment



Ariana Kattan/Adobe Stock, file #444909214

The goal is not to rescue survivors—it is to support their autonomy and decision-making.



Case Scenario





Case Scenario: Background

Maria is a 32-year-old woman who uses American Sign Language (ASL) as her primary language. She is married and her husband, **Daniel**, is an active-duty Service member. They have been married for six years and currently live near his military installation.

Maria moved to the area after Daniel received a new assignment. She does not have family nearby and has had difficulty building a support network outside of the Deaf community.

Daniel is hearing and has never learned ASL beyond a few basic signs.





What's Happening

Over the past year, Daniel's behavior toward Maria has become increasingly controlling. He:

- Becomes angry when Maria communicates with Deaf friends through video calls or text.
- Takes her phone away during arguments.
- Has intentionally hidden or taken her hearing devices and refused to return them.
- Tells Maria that no one will believe her because she is Deaf and he is a respected Service member.





What's Happening Cont.

- Tells her that reporting him could damage his military career and cause her to lose their housing and benefits.
- Has physically grabbed and pushed Maria during arguments.
- Has threatened to take their children if she leaves.
- Frequently tells Maria that she “misunderstands” what he says because she cannot hear him.

During one incident, Daniel became angry after Maria attempted to contact a Deaf friend for help. He grabbed her phone, blocked the doorway, and pushed her against a wall. Maria later contacts a domestic abuse agency through text message.





The First Contact

The advocate initially asks Maria to call the agency. Maria responds: "I am Deaf. I cannot safely call. Can we communicate through text or video?"

The advocate schedules a video appointment but does not arrange a qualified ASL interpreter. Instead, the advocate asks Daniel to interpret because he is "already there." Maria becomes uncomfortable and stops communicating.

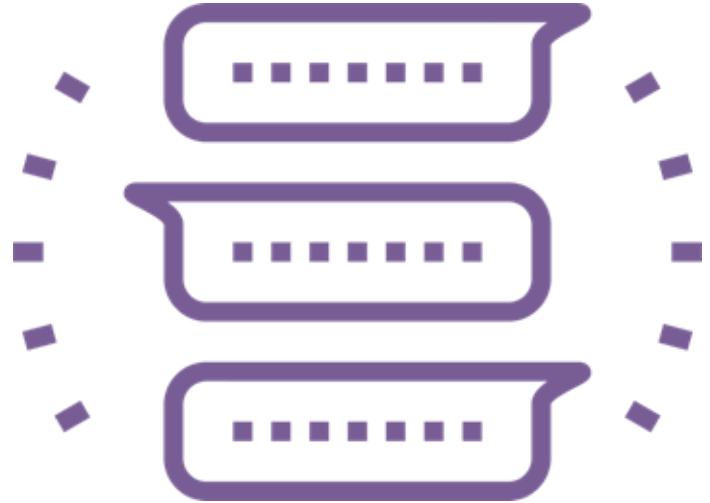
Several days later, Maria contacts the agency again and says: "I need help, but I don't know who I can trust. My husband knows everyone on base. I am afraid that if I report him, I will lose everything."



Reflection



- *What forms of abuse do you identify?*
- *What makes this situation different for a Deaf survivor?*
- *What should the advocate do differently?*



Share your thoughts with
us in the chat pod.



Accessibility Practices

- ☐ Provide qualified interpreters.
- ☐ Offer real-time captioning.
- ☐ Ensure videos are captioned.
- ☐ Provide written materials in plain language.
- ☐ Offer text, email, and video contact options.
- ☐ Ensure visual alerts when possible.
- ☐ Train staff on Deaf culture and accessibility.
- ☐ Include accessibility information in outreach materials.





Community Resources

- Deaf advocacy organizations
- Domestic abuse programs
- Military Family Advocacy Programs (FAP)
- Legal services
- Mental health providers
- Crisis services with accessibility options

Examples:

- DeafDOVE
- National Deaf Therapy
- My Deaf Therapy
- DeafLEAD



Resource:

DeafDOVE, [Sibling Agencies](#)



A person is sitting on a light-colored couch in a bright, modern living room. They are using a laptop and a notebook. The laptop screen shows a video call with two people. The person is holding a pen and writing in the notebook. The room has large windows with blinds, indoor plants, and a small wooden house model on a table in the background.

What are your key takeaways?

A woman with red, wavy hair and blue eyes, wearing a light pink button-down shirt, is looking towards the right side of the frame. She has a slight smile and her hands are clasped near her chest. In the foreground on the right, the back of a person with long brown hair is visible, facing the woman. The background is a blurred office or meeting room with shelves and a computer monitor.

Q & A: Let us know your questions!

Contact DOVE

For information/referral, information on volunteering opportunities
or general questions:

(303) 831-7932

office@deafdove.org

For immediate or crisis/hotline
support from an advocate:

(303) 831-7874

hotline@deafdove.org



Deaf Overcoming Violence through Empowerment

Access Our Resources



Resources

- Scan the QR code to access all webinar resources, including tools, links, and more.
- Use these resources to support continued learning and practical application in your work.

[OneOp.org/webinar_resource/
support-for-deaf-and-hard-of-
hearing-survivors-of-domestic-abuse/](https://OneOp.org/webinar_resource/support-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-survivors-of-domestic-abuse/)

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- The Defense Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program
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October 8, 2026

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