

HEARING IMPAIRMENTS IN ROCK CLIMBING AND BOULDERING

As a coach, instructor or volunteer there are some simple things you can do to make sure that climbing is accessible for someone with a hearing impairment.

Considerations

Ensure you have an option for someone with a hearing impairment to contact you, having only a telephone contact, or an email address that isn't regularly monitored will make it difficult for people to get in touch with you.

Your first step should be to talk to the participant prior to the session to understand their personal support needs, everyone is different.

Don't be afraid to ask questions to understand individual needs.

- How much can the person hear?
- What are the best methods of communication for that person, lip reading, will they bring an interpreter?

Ensure the participant receives a friendly welcome as soon as they arrive by briefing reception staff on communicating with someone with a hearing impairment.

Use visual methods of teaching, have an information pack available to use and refer too. Establish signs that might be used whilst the participant is climbing, Deaf Climbing UK produced the [Sign Climb System](#) which is an excellent resource.

Try to minimise background noise, and music levels, use quieter areas and consider noise from weather conditions such as wind.

For some participants with hearing aids, or cochlear implants some helmets may not be suitable.

Promotion and advertising

Not everyone with a hearing impairment will view themselves as having a disability, the English Federation of Disability Sport's (EFDS) '[Talk to Me](#)' report outlines 10 principles you can follow to make the activity more attractive to disabled people.

Talk to the individual's values rather than to their impairment. People may not associate with the term disability or impairment. The EFDS '[Motivate Me](#)' resource outlines 6 key values.



If providing specific sessions, or events – promote the activity with local Deaf Societies, and inform National Organisations such as [UK Deaf Sport](#), [Deaf Climbing UK](#) and the [BMC](#) who can promote the opportunity to further networks.

Promote your accessibility information on your website, make it easy for potential customers to find what they are looking for and to know that your sessions are suitable for them.

Top tips for communication

- Speak clearly but don't over exaggerate lip movements when speaking.
- Face the participant when speaking, avoid standing in front of a light source, this may obscure the participant's view of your face and make lip reading difficult.
- Suggest the participant stand at the front of the group, do this before the session rather than bring the person to the front during the session.
- Ensure the participant is paying attention before speaking to them, a tap on the shoulder or wave will get someone's attention.
- If using specific climbing related terms or new words, write them down, new words can be difficult to lip read and understand. Make sure the participant can understand sport specific signals; Deaf Climbing UK produced the [Sign Climb System](#), a cross-disability communication method to increase accessibility. To get someone's attention when they are climbing you can swing the rope firmly sideways, practice at low level first so the climber knows what to expect.
- If other people are contributing to the session repeat their contributions so the person with a hearing impairment has understood, they may not have realised someone else's contribution.
- Check the participants understanding, but do this in a way that doesn't single someone out. Facial expressions can highlight whether someone has heard and understands. Be prepared to rephrase if someone hasn't fully understood.
- For some people with a hearing impairment their speech may be affected. Don't be afraid to ask someone to repeat if you didn't quite understand.



Don't overthink what you say – it is perfectly acceptable to say something like “listen up”.

Find out more

Actions on Hearing Loss have some [Top Tips for Communication](#).

Further develop your communication with UK Deaf Sport's [Effective Communication Course](#).

Further develop your understanding of Hearing Impairments with Deaf Climbing UK's [Deaf Awareness in Rock Climbing](#) course