

Dear [name of child/children's] teachers,

Hello! This letter is to provide information about my child/our children who will be in your classroom for the school year.

(The children's father and I/my husband and I) are (Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing). We both use American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken English in our home. There are very clear differences in the two languages and the resulting culture of each that sometimes leads to conflicts.

My child/Our children are often called "Children of Deaf Adults" (CODA) or "Kids of Deaf Adults" (KODA) and he/she/they have certain behaviors that are perfectly acceptable in the Deaf Culture but may not be acceptable in the hearing mainstream culture. This letter, I hope, may explain some subtle and some not so subtle behaviors that my child/our children may exhibit.

One example would be eye contact. In ASL, it is imperative that we have eye contact in order to understand each other. In Spoken English, it is not necessary and in fact can be quite rude to be 'staring' while talking and listening. Along with this is the initiation of the conversation. In ASL and Deaf Culture, often one or both persons are Deaf or hard of hearing, so simply saying 'Mr. Smith' or 'excuse me' will not work. We tap lightly on the arm or shoulder (never the hands, face or body), or if the person is out of reach, we will wave our hands, turn the lights on and off rapidly, or stamp our hands/feet on the table or floor in order to send vibrations. In these ways, we obtain the person's attention to initiate the conversation. However, if you look away during the conversation, my child/our children may stop talking and may get upset by the "rudeness" of looking away.

My child/Our children may need to learn to respond to voice calling of he/she/their name and to directions given while facing elsewhere. For my child/our children to learn, this may take time. You may need to tap them gently on the shoulder if my child/our children is absorbed in something and fails to 'hear' you calling them. Just tap his/her/their shoulder and say, "I called your name, next time, listen for when I call your name."

If you see my child/our children doing certain things like: stamping his/her/their foot, hitting the table, waving his/her/their hand, getting out of his/her/their seat to tap you on the shoulder, or tapping his/her/their fellow students on the shoulder, know these are appropriate behaviors at home as it's part of the visual environment behavior etiquette. Let her/him/them know that he/she/they need to say "Excuse me..." or quietly raise his/her/their hand. If my child/our

children seems to have difficulties following the classroom rules, please let us know and perhaps we can work together in helping my child/our children remember.

In sign language, we sign all the numbers up to 999 on one hand. So the number "3" that hearing people tend to gesture, we understand to mean "6". Our "3" has the thumb, and the first two fingers straighten with the last two fingers (the ring finger and baby finger) curled down. If you prefer that my child/our children gestures the hearing way... you can explain that hearing people sign their numbers differently and that both ways are correct.

vs

Hearing people using gesture vs Deaf people using ASL

Again let me know so we can work with my child/our children in remembering what the class does.

My child/Our children may have 'lapses' where he/she/they sign without voice – just gently remind them to "use your voice". If my child/our children meet someone who signs, he/she/they may prefer to use just sign without voice, which is appropriate as ASL has its own syntax and grammatical rules which cannot be used concurrently with spoken English. It is similar to the idea that a person cannot speak two different languages at the same time.

Other things to be aware of are:

Visual Orientations: written work and written instructions on the chalkboard works very well for the CODA to read and absorb conceptually.

Eye Contact: CODA and Self Esteem - this helps greatly to allow the CODA to feel all is well. Most hearing children process information by listening, but CODAs tend to look visually to access information.

Parent and Teacher Conferences and any school sponsored events and activities: Please be conscious of the fact that ASL-English interpreters will be necessary for these events and contact [name of person who takes care of the school district interpreting services] for scheduling the interpreters.

If there is a problem, please do let me know what it is so we can work with my child/our children at home. If you are puzzled by any behavior of my child/our children, feel free to ask me anything you want. If you wish to have a Deaf Awareness time in your classroom, we/I may be able to come and do this. We/I can tell about and show the different things we use in our homes, such as video phones and flashing lights for a variety of things: baby cry lights, phone lights, and doorbell lights.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. We look forward to working closely with you all in this coming school year. You all have a tremendous job as a teacher and I applaud you who have chosen this field.

Sincerely,

(your names)
(child/children's name's mom/mother/mama, etc)
(contact information)

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