

understanding the interpreted proceedings. This is true because many deaf people do not use or understand English well and may not have fully mastered sign language either. Courts naturally expect that any sign language interpreter can effectively mitigate the language issues presented by deaf Americans. While this may be true with other languages, deaf users of American Sign Language (ASL) present different linguistic challenges for the courts and for court interpreters. This paper is designed to help you understand the unique circumstances of deaf Americans and how the process of acquiring language as children affects their use of it as adults.

Language learning normally starts in early childhood. Assuming easy access to language, the process is typically well underway by the time the child enters school. For deaf children, however, access to language is anything but easy. The critical window for learning language is considered to be prior to age seven. It has been estimated that only ten percent of deaf children are born into families with parents who are also deaf and are able to engage the deaf child in the process of natural language development

prior experience in communicating or living with a deaf individual and therefore are ill-equipped to address the unique language and communication needs of a deaf child. As a result, the majority of deaf children are deprived of exposure and access to a language-rich family environment.

As well, it is common for it to take several months or years before a deaf child is diagnosed as having a hearing loss. This delay impacts the use of various alternatives—such as the use of sign language—

before parents can use sign language to communicate with their child, they first must learn the



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