

DEAFplus Individuals and the Importance of DEAF Identity

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ABSTRACT: There is much to be gained from celebrating diversity on a personal and societal level. Deaf individuals with multiple conditions should see themselves as part of the greater Deaf Community. In order to be healthy, productive members of our diverse societies, DEAFplus individuals need effective communication and a healthy Deaf Identity – both in others' eyes and their own. Limited access to visual communication, including sign language, isolates DEAFplus individuals in oral-aural dependent environments. One's inability to communicate effectively is frequently an underlying reason for challenging behavior in this vulnerable population. Such behaviors and the inability to communicate further restricts the DEAFplus individual's engagement with their community. Regardless of communication modalities used by the individual, self-esteem is closely linked how one perceives their deafness. The importance of role models is recognized as critical in fostering one's healthy Deaf Identity, and Deaf role models are necessary to empower DEAFplus individuals. Dr. Nutt will draw from personal experience and published research to discuss how fostering an individual's Deaf Identity is crucial to meaningful inclusion of DEAFplus individuals.