



NZSL FACTS

Conversation culture

New Zealand Sign Language is a visual language, so the conversation culture is different from spoken English.

For example, in NZSL, introducing yourself involves certain details, eye contact is important, knowing where the signing space is etc.

In spoken English, there is less eye contact and more auditory cues like "hmm" to keep conversation going.

When you introduce yourself, you would usually share:

- Your name fingerspelled
- Your sign name
- Whether you're Deaf or hearing
- If you're hearing, you will usually be asked who is teaching you NZSL
- If you're Deaf, you will talk about who you know in the Deaf community
- Where you're from e.g. Auckland, Christchurch
- Which school you went to (depending on generation)

Eye contact is incredibly important. When signing with someone, you need to be facing each other. If you break eye contact, without explanation, while the other person is signing to you, it is considered rude.

When starting a conversation with someone, you need to gain their attention by waving or tapping their shoulder, make eye contact first then start signing.



How to gain someone's attention:

- Wave your hand in their visual field
- If they're further away, make a bigger wave
- If you can't reach them, you can ask a third person to help gain their attention for you
- Tap their shoulder - two light taps is fine
- If urgent, harder taps are okay, just be careful not to frighten them or cause injury!

When conversing with someone, you need to watch their signing space. This means not only focusing on the hands, it involves the space from the head down to the chest area. This enables you to see the facial expressions, signs and body language more clearly.

This is also why generally you would be conversing at a bit of a distance (approx 1 metre apart) to see each other more clearly.

In spoken English, you would give auditory cues like "hmm", "ahh" etc to show your interest in the conversation.

In NZSL, visual cues include nodding, eyebrow raises, smiling, signs like "ahh I see", and continued eye contact.

Physical contact is also quite common, such as hugging when greeting and farewelling!



SOURCES

TeachSign

NZSL Level 1 - Unit 1 Handout - Eye Contact

TeachSign

NZSL Level 1 - Unit 1 Handout - Getting Attention

TeachSign

NZSL Level 1 - Unit 1 Handout - Conversation Starter

First Signs

firstsigns.co.nz/visual-communication/

Thumbs Up!

nzsl.tki.org.nz/Introduction/Deaf-culture

