



Ako session:
NZSL, Deaf Learners and
AI : Building Educator
Confidence

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& Seniors
Deaf Aotearoa
ACE Conference 2026
27th May 2026 3pm – 4.20pm AK



Deaf
AOTEAROA
TĀNGATA TURI



4^{TO} 10 MAY 2026

20 years

NZSIGNLANGUAGE.NZ

DEAF AOTEAROA OFFICES

14 offices (including National office in Wellington)

We provide services:



Maori Cultural Lead



Deaf People – who are we?

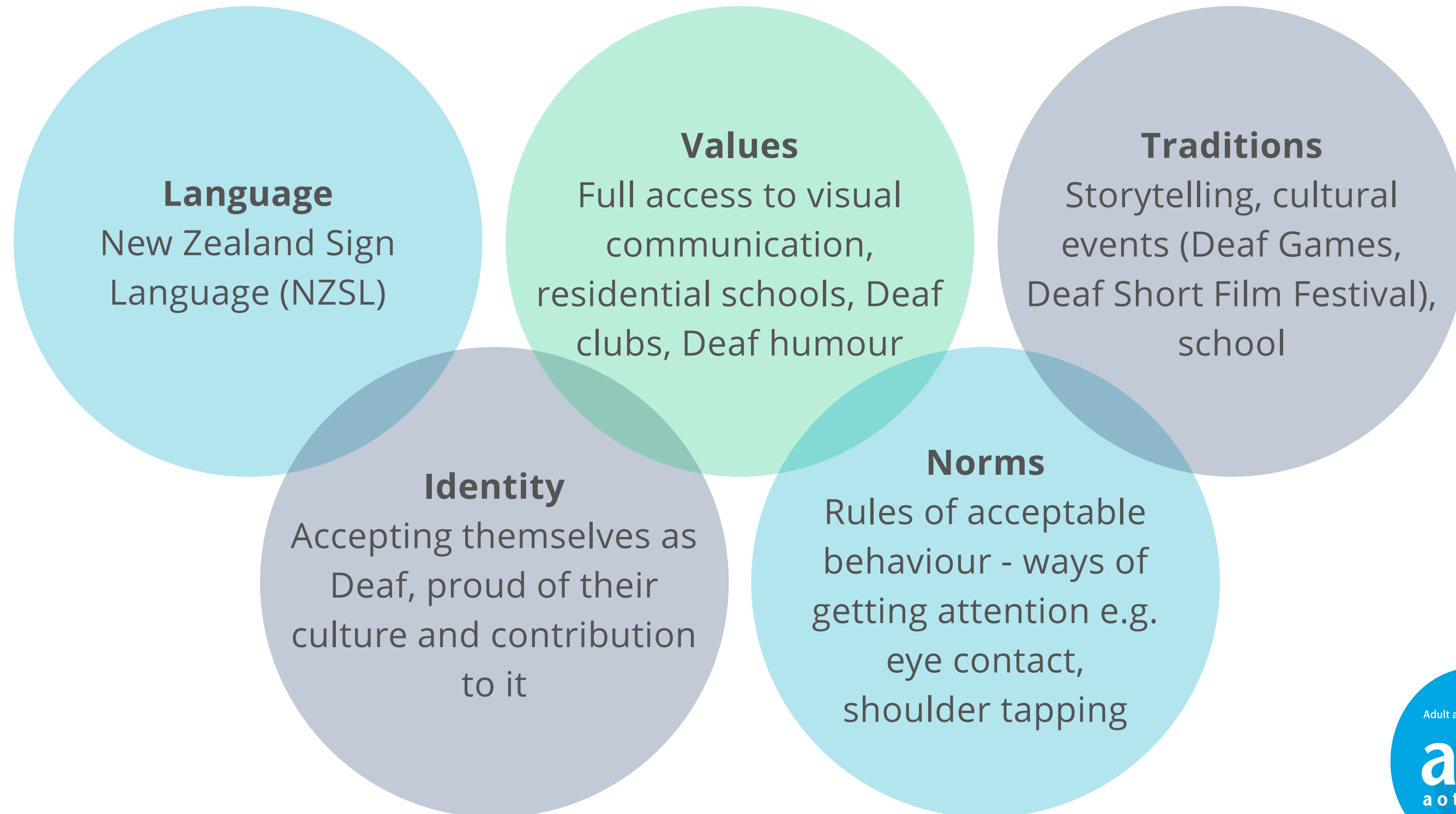


Deaf Identity

- Capital “D” Deaf = cultural identity, not a medical condition
- Proud members of a linguistic and cultural minority
- Shared experiences, values, and community bonds
- Deafness is a difference, not a deficit
- Strong belonging through Deaf schools, clubs, and events



DEAF CULTURE





About NZSL

- Official language of NZ since 2006 (NZSL Act)
- Unique to Aotearoa – distinct from BSL and Auslan
- A visual-spatial language with its own grammar and syntax
- First language for many Deaf New Zealanders
- Incorporates Māori concepts and NZ cultural references
- Uses handshapes, facial expressions, and body movement



Deaf Cultural Norms



Key Cultural Norms

- Maintain eye contact – looking away is like covering your ears
- Tap shoulder or wave to get attention – never shout
- Direct and open communication is valued
- Facial expressions are grammatical, not just emotional
- Storytelling and visual humour are central to Deaf culture
- Flashing lights used instead of doorbells or alarms

NZSL and AI – is it possible?



Yes!

Signing Avatars are being developed and in use around the world, even in Aotearoa!

What does this mean for Deaf people?

Signing avatars can increase NZSL access:

1. Public transport and safety – Auckland Transport
2. Emergencies broadcasts
3. Government information to the public

Hang on..... What about education? Health? Courts?

What does this mean for human hearing interpreters and Deaf translators? Will AI signing avatars take their jobs?



What a signing avatar looks like in action?

[Technology | Kara Technologies](#)

How Signing Avatars work?



What's happening now?



NZSL & AI Forum

Signing Avatars can provide sign language access anytime, anywhere—but...

We, the Deaf community, must have meaningful discussions about what this means for us'



Key points to wrap up AI.....

Risks

- Data ownership and sovereignty concerns
- Risk of flattening NZSL or language loss
- Low literacy users may benefit less from AI
- Digital divide within the Deaf community
- High risk in critical settings: court, hospital, emergencies, education

Sign Language AI Key Points

- Can increase NZSL access in low-risk settings (transport, notifications, hotels)
- Signing avatars do NOT replace human interpreters
- Deaf people's AI usage varies hugely across the community
- AI helps everyday tasks: proofreading, voice-to-text, accessibility
- ACE plays a key role in educating Deaf learners on safe AI use

Bias & Data Ethics

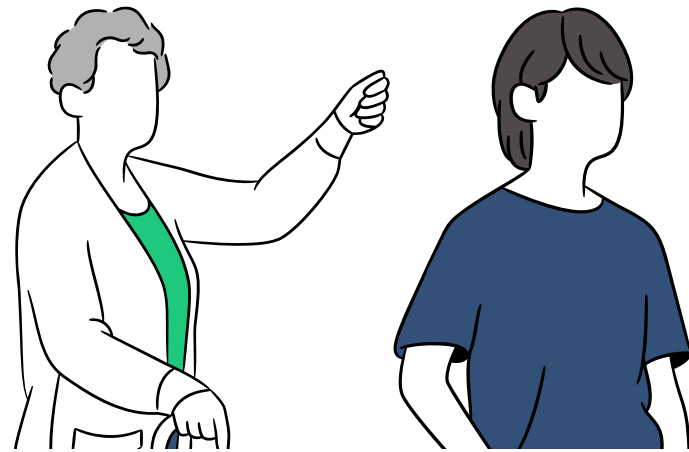
- Multiple types of bias: access, content, language, style, signer
- If Deaf people are excluded from data, bias grows
- Text-to-NZSL: Deaf community are the recipients
- NZSL-to-spoken language harder for AI — nuance and emotional intelligence
- AI cannot replicate “reading the room”

Three Principles

- Co-design: Deaf involved from start to finish
- Empowerment and data sovereignty for the Deaf community
- Deaf-led monitoring and oversight of AI tools
- Develop AI position statement and staff training in AI literacy
- Community and stakeholders to lead on guidelines and policy



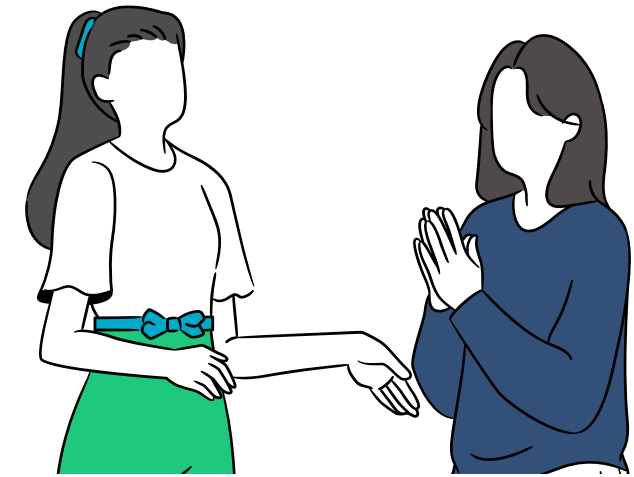
COMMUNICATION TIPS



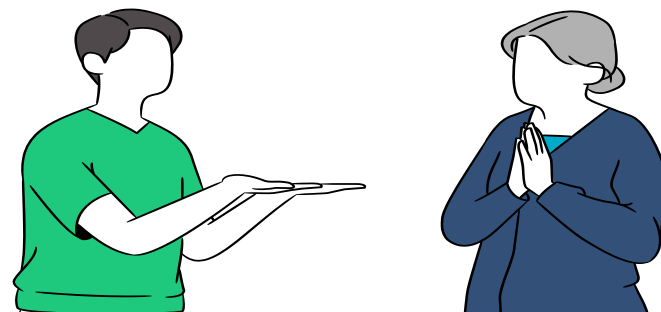
Tap on their shoulder



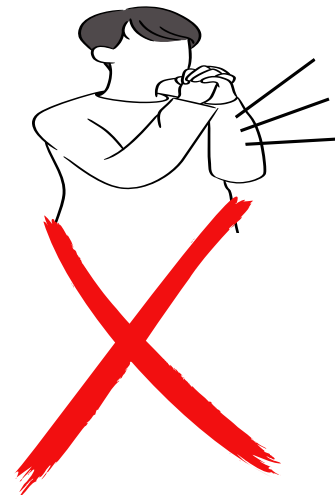
Wave your hand in front of the person



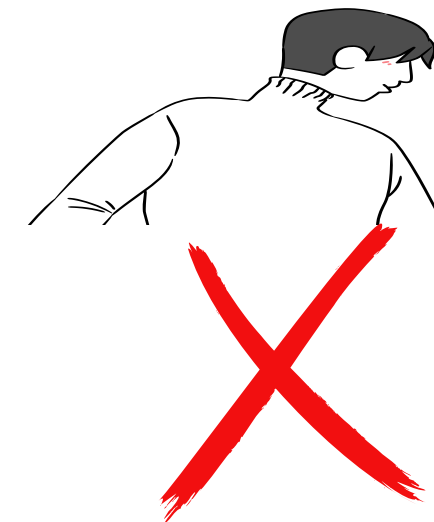
Talk face to face



Use pen and paper, or a device to type things down



Don't shout



Don't cover your mouth or look down

Hello

Kia ora



A TASTE OF NZSL



Good morning



You want coffee?



How are you?



Please

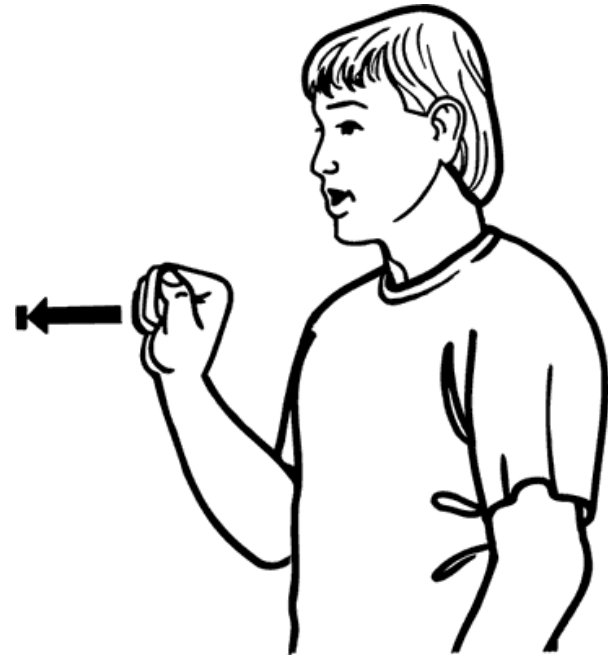


Thanks





Introducing yourselves



YOUR



NAME



WHAT



Nice meet you

Let's chat!



YOUR NAME WHAT?



MY NAME... (fingerspell).
YOUR NAME WHAT?

MY NAME... (fingerspell)

NICE-MEET YOU!

NICE-MEET YOU!

WANT TO LEARN MORE NZSL?

learnnzsl.nz

A free online learning portal



Check out NZSL Dictionary - free online at nzsl.nz or app



Visit teachsign.org.nz for local NZSL courses



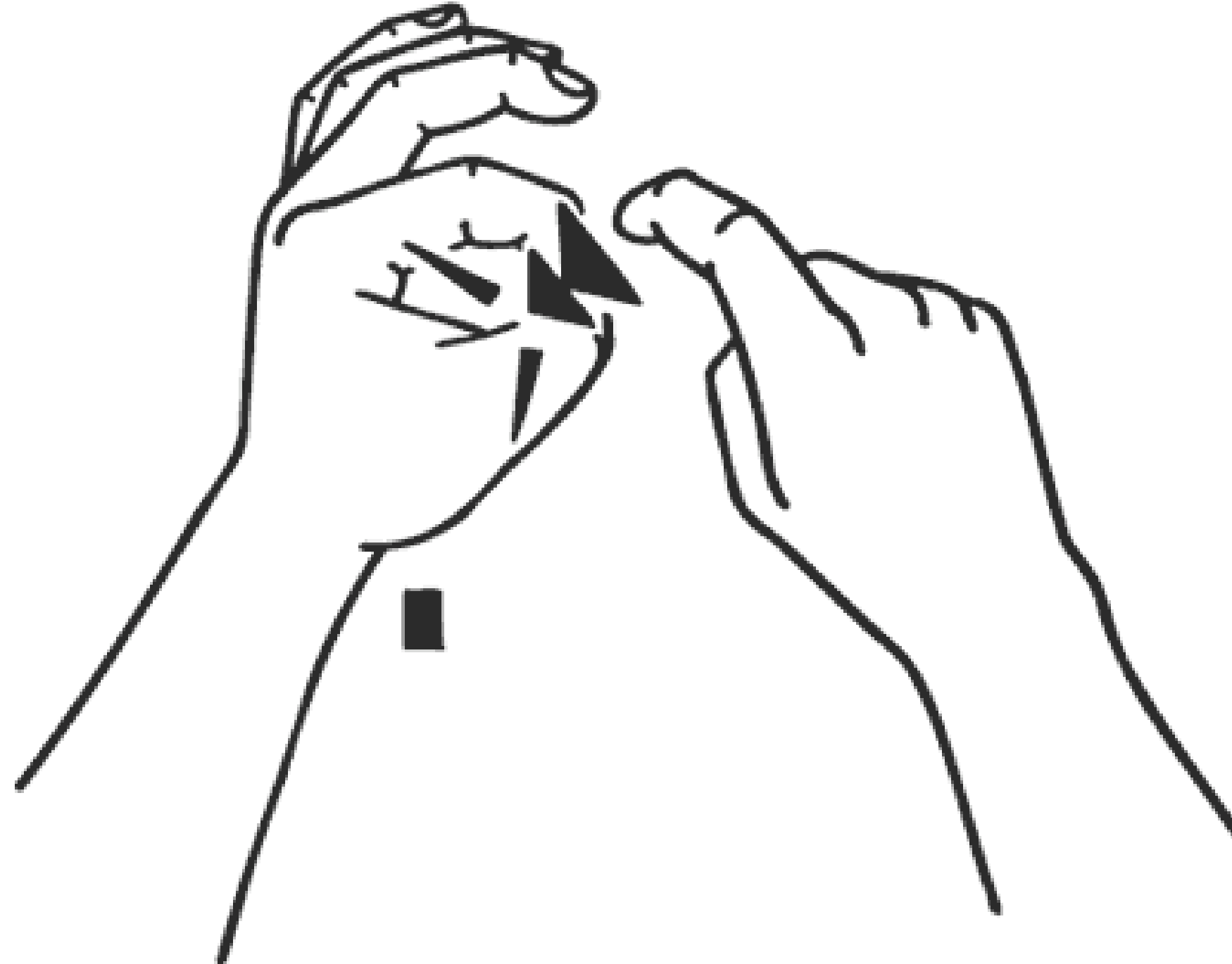
For Deaf Aotearoa's Deaf Awareness Workshops, visit deaf.org.nz



Other resources available at nzslweek.org.nz/resources



DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS/PATAI?



THANK YOU!



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