My name is Leslie Pertz, I am a certified EMDR therapist and approved consultant in Ann Arbor, MI. I am also a nationally certified ASL/English interpreter that I have been doing for 20 years. I do not identify as disabled, I grew up in a hearing household, but I have provided EMDR to many Deaf clients over the years and find the work quite meaningful.

Federal law, all insurance panels, and all licensing ethics that we are required to follow consider hearing loss as a disability. Some Deaf do not see themselves as disabled, but that the environment/society is limiting. We should be curious to find what works best for a client, then to honor their needs to provide the best EMDR experience for the person with a hearing loss.

Writing back and forth can be cumbersome and likely blocks a good flow of processing, so it’s usually best to hire a qualified interpreter. Your state likely has a dept of disability access, or a state chapter of interpreters (akin to NASW, for example) who can help you find an interpreter- at your expense. Again, just like the federal law HIPAA the Americans with Disabilities Act requires we follow it and yes that comes with business expenses maybe we did not foresee.

EMDR with Deaf clients is the same, and different for people with hearing loss. Using BLS tones might not be an option, but also don’t assume, and eye movements and tappers or butterfly hug is likely to work just fine. All phases of EMDR run just like with any other client, but you might need to work with the interpreter to find good interpretation of some English language eg, what is an NC? Any clinician thinking about doing EMDR with a Deaf person can, thinking about the needs of the client and taking time to learn about cultural considerations. And based on my experience of doing EMDR with Deaf people, just like with all, it can be a wonderful experience.

Note on language choice: I purposefully chose to sign this post without voice so it would be most accessible for D/deaf people who use ASL as their primary language, and to impart some experience to the general population of hearing people of what it might be like to encounter video content that is not immediately accessible to you. Please always caption your videos or have a transcript posted alongside, and always make sure captions are enabled on zoom meetings- Thanks!