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RESIDENTIAL DESIGN FOR DEAF PERSONS

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In rehabilitating those individuals who are deaf, the design of residential environments can play an important role. Space arrangements, floor plans, and special devices can be selected and designed in a fashion that best meet the needs of the deaf resident. Of utmost concern are those design modifications that enhance communication and safety.

Based on a review of the design literature, as well as informal interviews with and observation of a small group of deaf individuals, the following design recommendations are offered:

1. Select a ranch style floor plan that allows occupants to open the home as much as possible to allow good visual communication. A great room (which combines the kitchen, dining, and living areas) with an open furniture arrangement is suggested.
2. Design the home to be barrier-free to ensure mobility and safety.
3. Cluster the bedrooms on one side of the home to aid in rapid communication among occupants.
4. Design the front entrance with an adequate exterior light and a window set within the door to allow occupants to see visitors well enough to communicate using hands.
5. Provide ample counter top surfaces in the kitchen and flat surface areas throughout the remainder of the home (e.g., coffee tables, nightstands, and desks) to allow occupants to empty their hands for conversation purposes. Wall-mounted lamps in bedrooms can provide extra surfaces as well as task lighting.
6. Provide adequate lighting in every room for communication and safety purposes. The use of fluorescent lighting, night lights, and contrasting color schemes can all increase visibility and brightness of the interior.
7. Wire rooms that can be closed off from other household members, such as bathrooms and bedrooms, so that light switches exist on both sides of the door for emergency purposes.
8. Include necessary special devices (e.g., floor flashers, baby cry lights, and telecommunication equipment) to meet the requirements of occupants. These devices can be designed to blend into the residential interior. Setting the smoke detector and doorbell flush with the wall and designed with an exterior such as a teak veneer is one strategy for preserving the clean lines of a hallway or room.
9. Provide convenient space to store special devices, such as a wall unit that is visible from all portions of the room and that can effectively conceal associated wires.
10. Install a permanent electricity generator in the utility area of the home that can operate the most crucial special devices in case of a power outage.

When selecting a home or remodeling an existing home, deaf individuals should consider these design recommendations. Following the ten simple design modifications can enhance the environmental match between occupants and their homes, resulting in residential interiors that are comfortable, economical, beautiful, and suit occupants' needs. Rehabilitation professionals are in an excellent position to inform their deaf clients of design modifications that can improve quality of life.