HAPTIC SIGNALS
– 139 new and known signals

Danish DeafBlind Association
Haptic Signals
– 139 new and known signals
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The signals in this book are performed on Dorte Eriksen and Gerd Nielsen by contact person Anette Rosenqvist and interpreter Riinette Askgaard.

The signals are developed by deafblind people in Denmark and selected by Dorte Eriksen, Gerd Nielsen, Charlotte Dohm and Pia Hesse in cooperation with experienced interpreters and contact persons.

Thank you to everybody involved in the making of the book.

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Photos and graphics: Niels Holst – Holst Design & Project
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Haptic signals
– 139 new and known signals

... is a collection of the most common haptic signals used by people with visual and hearing impairments, deafblind people and their relatives and interpreters in Denmark.

By using haptic signals you can get information that others get through sight. This provides a better opportunity to participate actively and on an equal footing with others in social interaction. It is our hope that haptic signals will become a natural part of every day life for all deafblind people and people with visual and hearing impairments.

Previously published and new signals have been collected and standardized in this book in alphabetical order, so
that it can be an inspirational platform for the further development of signals both in Denmark and internationally.

The signals have been developed and chosen by deafblind people and people with visual and hearing impairments in collaboration with their contact persons and a reference group consisting of representatives from different parts of the deafblind community in Denmark.

**What are haptic signals?**

The word ‘haptic’ is Greek and means touch. Haptic signals are signals ‘drawn’ on the body – typically on the upper part of the back, shoulder or upper arm.

The signals can be performed simultaneously with conversation and can thus be used to make a visual description of what is going on in the room during the conversation or to illustrate for example the shape of a sculpture.
With haptic signals, deafblind people can get information discreetly about the surroundings or about other people’s mood and facial expressions, while the conversation can continue undisturbed.

If a person smiles, if people laugh at a joke, if your dinner partner raises his glass to make a toast, if the meeting commences or if a comment is said with irony. All these situations could lead to misunderstandings. These are all situations where visual interpretation is useful to help the deafblind to respond right away and adequately.

Not a language in itself
Haptic communication is not a language in itself, but is used as a supplement to speech, sign language or other forms of communication, when necessary.

Some of the signals have been developed with inspiration from Danish sign language.
Who can use haptic signals?
Haptic signals are useful for deafblind people and people with visual and hearing impairment, but blind people and the visually impaired can also benefit from haptic descriptions. Using signals can provide a better overview of a room or a building or even make it possible to manage a meeting.

For persons with a narrow field of vision, the signal DIRECTION can be of great help to locate where in the room sign language is performed.
6 reasons to use haptic signals

• when you would like to receive information discreetly and without disturbing those around you

• when your hands are occupied by sign language, braille reading or investigating something

• when there is too much noise to use your residual hearing

• when something is best described by drawing the shape of it, e.g. a room and its furnishings

• when you need to relax your arms/hands/ears/eyes, but still need to receive brief information

• when you need to orient yourself in a certain direction
**Category-signals**

Each signal belongs to a category.

Most categories have a specific category-signal, which can be used to introduce a signal in order to tune in to a certain context.

For example in the beginning of a haptic description of a dish, it might be useful to introduce with the category-signal FOOD.

If the description suddenly switches over to describe somebody’s reaction for example CURIOSUS, it might be useful to start with the category-signal PERSON.

In the category ‘Care’ there is no category signal, since the situation is usually given in advance (at the hospital, at the doctor, at the dentist etc.).

Signals belonging to the category ‘Other signals’ do not have a category-signal.
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**Adjust the signals to your needs**

Get started by selecting a single category or five signals that will be especially useful to you. When those signals have become a natural part of the communication, you can learn more signals.
You can also experiment with the size of the signals, the pressure and where on the body a signal will be easy to perform and receive.

In the book most of the signals are performed on the back, the shoulder or the upper arm, but they can also be performed elsewhere on the body.

The importance of a signal can be enhanced by using a larger movement, by repeating the movement or by adjusting the pressure. For example repeating the signal for LAUGHING indicates that people are still laughing. If a person is very angry, the signal for ANGRY can be performed with more pressure on the back.

Be aware that it might be difficult to receive signals through a thick sweater, and it can be difficult to perform signals, if a hood or a large collar is in the way.
Description of rooms and surroundings
Haptic signals are very suitable for describing a room and how it is furnished.

Begin by drawing a large square with both index fingers on the recipient’s back to indicate the outline of the room. Then draw the positions and shapes of tables, doors and other relevant objects in the room.

The outline of the room provides a basic framework to describe what takes place in the room afterwards.

Note that the room must be described from the position of the deafblind person. If you change places, it might be necessary to make a new description based on the new position.
Description of persons
Many haptic signals are linked to people’s moods and reactions e.g. in a conversation. Is the other person smiling? Does she seem angry or disappointed? Is she crying or laughing?

All this information is important to receive in order to respond immediately to the present mood of the conversation.

If appropriate, begin by using the category signal PERSON.

Feedback
To show whether a signal has been understood or not, the receiver can give feedback by:

- nodding (I understand)
- shaking one’s head (I don’t understand)
- lifting the hand (to say stop)
- wiggle fingers in the air finger tips pointing upwards (as the signal for WHAT)
EXERCISES

Exercise 1
Participants form a circle. One person draws a haptic signal on the back of the person that he or she is standing next to. He or she repeats the signal on the back of the next person and so on around the circle.

When the signal reaches the first person again, he or she says it out loud. Is it still the same signal?

Exercise 2
Use haptic signals to describe visually the room you are in.

Start by drawing the outline of the room by using both index fingers and then place windows, doors, tables and chairs in the room.

Use regular speech or sign language at the same time to explain what you are drawing.
Exercises

Exercise 3
A plate of food is best described by referring to the numbers on a clock face: Potatoes are placed at 3 o’clock, the meat is placed at 6 o’clock, and vegetables are placed at 9 o’clock.

If the food has a remarkable shape or colour, then describe it. If necessary use the category signals for COLOUR and FOOD at the beginning of the description.

Exercise 4
Go for a walk.

Find trees, buildings, rooms, sculptures and other objects that can be described by drawing them on the back.

Enjoy haptic signals!
Use your index finger to make a tick movement on the shoulder.
Write an opposite V on the back.
Bend the fingers and place all the fingertips against the back.

Move the hand from side to side in a 'shaking' movement.
Pat both hands one after the other against the back. Repeat the movement as long as people are applauding.

When the applause dies out, clap more gently and let the hands slide downwards.
Move the index finger back and forth along the back according to the direction of the arrow.
TIP
The Danish word for beer is Øl.

Write an Ø (small circle with a line through it) on the upper arm.
Shape a hand as if holding a glass. Loosely grab around the upper arm with the little finger hand side downwards.

Move the hand up the arm.

**TIP**

Can be used as introduction to different beverages.
Colours

Place a flat outstretched hand palm against the upper arm.
Point the fingertips upwards.
Turn the hand 90 degrees forwards.
Use two fingers and thumb to squeeze gently around the upper arm.
Use a flat, outstretched hand. Place the palm against the upper arm, the fingertips pointing forward.

Move the hand upwards and turn it 90 degrees.
Move the hand upwards on the back with fingertips pointing upwards while spreading the fingers like a blush spreading across a person's face.
Slowly drum the fingers against the back. Repeat the movement.
BREAD

Food & beverage

Use the tip of your thumb to cut a 'slice' over the shoulder.
Make a 'cut' into the upper arm using the index and middle fingers.

Hold the 'cut' for a moment.
Make a fist and place the little finger hand side against the upper arm.
Move the hand round in a small circle.
Bend your fingers and place all fingertips on the shoulder and remove them again.
Hold two fists against the back and move them as if turning the wheel of a car.
Food & beverage

Fingers wiggle up the upper arm like bubbles fizzing. The fingers spread out and 'jump' from the shoulder.
Shape the hand as if holding a glass. Loosely grab around the upper arm, the little finger hand side downwards. Keep the hand in this position as long as people are toasting.

Make a double clap or gently squeeze the arm, when people drink.
Place the index and middlefingers against the upper arm, fingertips pointing upwards.

Make a short quick movement downwards along the arm and outwards.

Repeat the movement.
Make a fist and place the little finger hand side towards the shoulder.

Move the hand around in a circle shaped movement.
COFFEE TROLLEY

Food & beverage

Make a fist and place the little finger hand side towards the shoulder.
Move the hand around in a circle shaped movement.

COFFEE + DIRECTION

Move a flat hand across the back little finger hands side against the back.
Spread your fingers and move the hand down the upper arm making a waving movement from side to side.

**TIP**
Can be used to introduce all colours.
COUGHING

Shape a hand as if holding a glass. Loosely grab around the upper arm, the little finger hand side downwards. Move the hand up and down as long as the coughing continues.
Quickly draw a vertical line down the back using the index fingertip.

Quickly draw another vertical line parallel to the first.
Make a short and quick downwards movement on the back using only one fingertip.

Repeat the movement.
DANGER

Other

Draw a big cross.
Using index fingers of both hands, poke both fingers close together on the back.

Lift the fingers, move them outwards and make two new pokes.
Place a flat, outstretched hand, the little finger hand side against the back.

Move the hand in the relevant direction.
Draw a line on the recipient's arm by the elbow using the edge of an outstretched hand.
Move the hand down the back in a slow movement with a flat hand and with fingertips apart pointing upwards.
**TIP**

»L« comes from the Danish word for doctor = læge.

Write an L on the back of the recipient hand.
Place a flat outstretched hand with the little finger hand side against the back.

Tilt the hand up or down like a door opening or closing.

**TIP**
Can be used in room description.
DOUBLE CLICK

Computer & smartphone

TIP
Can be combined with SCREEN and placed according to where to double click on the screen.

Rest your hand on the recipient's back and make two pokes quickly one after another using the index finger.
Make a fist and place thumb and index finger hand side against the back.

Move the hand down the back while opening it to indicate that something has been dropped.
DRUNK
— a person is drunk

Person

Draw a winding line upwards using the fingertip.
Place a flat hand, fingers spread against the back, ingertips pointing upwards.

Slowly bend the fingertips against the back until the hand is made into a fist (like toes curling).
Draw a reversed L on the back
(a short vertical line then a horizontal line turning to the left).
Draw a big 'minus' on the back consisting of a horizontal line and one dot above the line, and another dot below the line.

The dots are made as small circles.
Using index and middle finger of one hand, make two dots simultaneously with some distance between them (for eyes).

Place one finger horizontally above the dots and move it upwards (as an eyebrow).
Shape a hand as if holding a glass.

Place the thumb and index finger hand side against the back and shortly tilt the hand forward down and then back again to show eyelids closing shut and opening by bending the wrist.
'Use all fingers on one hand to grab the back as if taking something.
Make a wiping movement from side to side using the edge of the hand and turning it back and forth against the back.
TIP
Can be used as an introduction to description of food.

Draw a circle on the upper arm using the fingertip.
Bend the fingertips and place them against the upper arm.

Rotate the hand back and forth.

Make sure the fingertips touch the upper arm during both rotations.
GOOD

TIP
Can be used as abbreviation for greetings such as Good morning, Good night, Good evening etc

Write a capital G on the back.
Stretch the fingers and place a flat palm against the upper arm, fingers pointing upwards.

Move the hand downwards and away from the arm in an as weeping movement.
GREETING

Push gently twice behind the elbow using a flat hand.
Use a flat outstretched hand with the fingertips pointing forward.

Make a light sweeping movement upwards on the upper arm.

Repeat the movement.
Draw a curved (sulky) line using the fingertip.
Poke twice against the upper arm and simultaneously make a poke on the back showing where the person is located in the room.

**TIP**

Use YES to indicate that your hand has been noted.
Write a capital C on the upper arm. Make a dot in the middle.
Somebody wants to hug you.

Gently grab the upper arm with your hand and give the arm a little squeeze.

**TIP**

Push gently on one arm to indicate whether the person uses the left or right cheek.
HURTS

Care

Draw a line across the back of the hand.
Drum quickly with shifting fingers against the back.

Repeat the movement.
INJECTION

Care

Make a poke on the inside of the elbow joint and thereafter a poke where the injection will take place on the body.
Write the letter i on the back.
Include the dot above.
Place your hand outstretched on the back and flip it palm down and palm up.

Repeat the movement as long as interpretation is going on.
Place a flat hand, palm down on one shoulder.

Hold the position for a little while.
IRONY

Other

TIP

Use the signal as soon as the conversation turns ironic.

Make a dot on the back and a drilling movement with the index finger a few times.
Knock on the back using your knuckles.
Scratch up and down the back using the fingertips. Repeat the movement as long as the laughter continues.
Move your hand down the upper arm using a flat horizontal hand little finger against the arm.

TIP
Can also be used for 'speak softer'.
Use capital letters.

Each letter is written preferably in one movement, without lifting the finger.
Draw a small circle on the back.

Let your finger continue round and round as long as the machine is loading or working.

Make a short stop every time the finger passes the top of the circle.
LOOKING AT YOU

With the index finger of one hand make a poke on the back to indicate the recipient's position.

With the other hand draw parallel lines using the index and middle finger towards the poke to show that people standing around are looking.
Write a capital T on the upper arm. Draw a circle around the T.

**TIP**

T stands for 'Tele-slynge' (the Danish word for loop system)
Write a capital M on the upper arm. Use thumb and index finger to make two parallel lines down the upper arm.
Write a capital M on the upper arm and draw a circle around it.

**TIP**

Can be used in combination with DIRECTION.
MOBILE
– phone ringing

Computer & smartphone

Place the thumb and little finger tip against the upper arm with the other fingers curled (like a phone receiver) and touch the arm with the little finger and thumb in turns.
Move your hand up the upper arm using a flat horizontal hand, little finger against the arm.

TIP
Can also be used for 'speak up'.
Place the back of the hand against the upper arm.

Press a flat outstretched hand firmly against the arm.
Use thumb and index finger to draw two parallel zig-zag lines down the back (like shaking legs).
TIP

Can also be used to erase a wrong signal.

Use a flat, outstretched hand, palm against the back and fingertips pointing upwards. Move the hand from side to side a couple of times.
Clap gently a couple of times on the back, shoulder or upper arm using a flat, outstretched hand.
Clasp fingers together and move them around on the back like ants.
Write one number at a time on the back preferably in one movement without lifting the finger.
**NURSE**

**Person**

*Draw a cross on the back of the hand using two fingers held close together.*
Draw a tick on the back.

**TIP**
Or write OK using capital letters.
Place the thumb and index finger hand side against the upper arm.

Open and close the hand repeatedly with thumb and index finger out-stretched.

Repeat the movement.
Use the little finger hand sides to 'push' something from each side towards the middle of the back.

Lay down flat one hand after the other on top of each other.
Press your thumb firmly against the upper arm and remove it with a sweeping movement.
Draw an exclamation mark on the back.
Person

CATEGORY-SIGNAL

TIP

Can be used as introduction to all descriptions of personal characteristics.

Make the signal narrow for a slim person or wider for a larger person.

Use thumb and index finger to make two parallel lines down the upper arm.
Draw a circle on the upper arm using the fingertip.

TIP
Use the edge of the hand to illustrate how to use the knife to push food back into the centre of the plate:
Upwards / downwards / from the left / from the right
Use two fingers to make a small curve on the upper arm.
Draw a question mark on the back.
Draw a long horizontal line across the back.
Move both hands downwards on the back with fingers spread like rain falling.
Move the hand back and forth with the back of the hand against the back and fingertips pointing upwards.

Flip the hand and repeat the movement, as if turning page sin a book.
Move both hands upwards and outwards on the back towards each side.
Use the index finger and thumb to draw a small vertical rectangle on the upper arm.

Use two fingers put together to make a bow on the upper arm in one movement.
Draw a horizontal line by moving the side of the index finger along the upper arm.

**TIP**
Can be combined with BEVERAGE for red wine.
Using both index fingers draw the two halves of a heart simultaneously on the back.
Draw a large rectangle on the back to illustrate that room description starts.

Then draw the actual shape of the room. Make a poke where the recipient is placed.

At last, draw the furniture, windows, doors, etc.

TIP
Use the large rectangle as introduction to all room descriptions.
TIP

Remember to describe the room from the point of view of the recipient.
If you move, you might need to draw the room again, seen from the deafblind person's perspective.

Draw the shape of the room. Make a poke where the receipient is placed.

At last, draw the furniture, windows, doors, etc.
Slowly draw a vertical line down the back using the fingertip. Slowly draw a vertical line parallel to the first one.
**SCREEN**

**TIP**

Can be used as an introduction and frame to show where elements on a screen are placed.

Using both index fingers draw the upper frame and the two sides of a screen on the back.
Place a flat, outstretched hand, the little finger hand side against the back.

Move the hand down the back in a vertical line.
Write a capital S on the upper arm.
Use a flat outstretched hand, palm against the back and fingertips pointing upwards.

Move the hand from side to side a couple of times.
Use two fingers put together to make a bow on the upper arm in one movement.
Write a Z using your index finger.
**SMILING**

*Person*

**TIP**

Can be made wider or firmer to underline a great smile.

*Draw a curved (smiling) line using the fingertip.*
Draw a horizontal line on the back with a wavy line rising as smoke.
SNOW

Rooms & Surroundings

Use all fingers to drum gently down the back.
Fingers wiggle up the upper arm as bobbles.
SPEAK
(... your turn)

Rooms & Surroundings

Poke twice against the back using the index fingertip.

Place the poke on the back indicating the position of the speaking person in the room.
Poke twice against the back using the index fingertip.

Place the poke on the back indicating the position of the speaking person in the room.

(SPEAKING
(... someone else)

Rooms & Surroundings)
Other

**TIP**

Can be used in combination with INTERRUPTING.

Use the index finger to tap the upper arm a few times as if tapping the glass for 'speech'.
Draw the outline of the stairs upwards or downwards on the back.

**TIP**
Can be combined with DIRECTION.
TIP

Use FINISHED when it is time to sit down again.

Push firmly upwards underneath the elbow.
Place your hand on top of the recipient's hand and slide gently towards the fingers.

Keep your hand still on top of the recipient's hand, when the recipient is not allowed to move.

**TIP**

Use FINISHED when the recipient is allowed to move again.
Place a flat outstretched hand, palm against the back. Point the fingertips upwards.

Hold this hand position for a moment.
Draw a circle (a sun) on the back.
Place all fingertips on the sun and spread them out as rays.

**TIP**
Let the rays radiate in the actual direction of the sun compared to the position of the recipient.
Make a quick sweeping movement upwards on the back using a flat outstretched hand.
Use your fingertips to make a sweeping movement sideways on the back.
Use both little finger hand sides to 'push' something from each side towards the middle of the back.

Lay down flat one hand after the other on top of each other.
Shape the hand as if holding a glass. Open and close the hand against the back with fingers outstretched.

Repeat the movement.
Thumb and index fingertips are put together and moved down the upper arm and back up again (as a tea bag being dipped).
TEMPERATURE – will be taken

Care

Draw a line up the index finger.
Let the index and middle fingertips 'walk' back and forth a few times on the back.

Continue as long as the person is thinking.
Use the index finger and thumb to draw a small vertica rectangle on the upper arm.
Other

Poke twice on the upperside of the recipient's wrist.
Draw a small cross on the upper arm.
Let the fingers 'type' against the back as if typing on a keyboard.
Place the index and middle fingers against the back and shift from finger to finger, only one finger at a time touching the back.
Move the index finger side back and forth against the upper arm.
The index and middle fingers 'walk' across the back.

**TIP**

Let the fingers 'walk' in the actual direction.
Fingers wiggle down the upper arm as water flowing.
Place the hand beneath the elbow and let the fingers wiggle against the forearm.
Colours

**TIP**

Can be combined with BEVERAGE for white wine.

Place the fingertips against the upper arm. Make a quick and short movement downwards.

Repeat the movement.
The position of windows are drawn on the back illustrated by straight lines.
PERSON + K

Use thumb and index finger to make two parallel lines down the upper arm.

Write a capital K on the upper arm (K for Danish ‘Kvinde’).
Draw wavy lines on the back as if writing on paper.
Join the fingertips and place them against the back.

Open and close the fingers against the back, separating and joining the fingertips.
Stretch thumb and index finger and place them against the upper arm.

Tilt the hand forward by bending the wrist.
Pat gently a couple of times on the back, shoulder or forearm using a flat, outstretched hand.
Make a double poke on the upper arm.

**TIP**

Can be combined with room description to show where the recipient is in the room.
ANGRY · ANNOYED · APPLAUDING · BLUSHING · BORED · COUGHING CRYING · CURIOUS · DISABLED · DISAPPOINTED · DOCTOR · DRUNK EMBARRASSING · EYEBROWS RAISED · EYES CLOSED · GREETING GRUMPY · IMPATIENT · INTERESTED · LAUGHING · LOOKING AT YOU · MAN · NERVOUS · NODDING · NURSE · PACKING UP PERSISTANT · PERSON · READING · SAD · SERIOUS · SHAKING ONES HEAD · SLEEPING · SMILING · SMOKING · SURPRISED TALKING · THINKING · UNSURE · WOMAN · WRITING · YAWNING · YOU · DIRECTION · DOOR · HAND RAISED · KNOCK · LOOP SYSTEM · MICROPHONE · NOISE · QUIET · RAIN · ROOM · ROOM DESCRIPTION · SNOW · SPEAK (YOUR TURN) · SPEAKING (SOMEONE ELSE) · STAIRS · SUN · WALKING · WINDOW · BLACK BLUE · BROWN · COLOUR · GREEN · GREY · ORANGE · PURPLE RED · WHITE · YELLOW · BEER · BEVERAGE · BREAD · CAKE CHAMPAGNE · CHEERS · CHOCOLATE · COFFEE · COFFEE TROLLEY FOOD · FRUIT · PLATE · SERVING · SOFT DRINK · TEA · WATER · ARROW KEY · DOUBLE CLICK · ENTER (KEY) · LOADING · MOBILE PHONE · SCREEN · SWIPE · TAB KEY · TYPING · BLOOD PRESSURE HURTS · INJECTION · STAY STILL · TEMPERATURE · AGAIN · BREAK CAR · DANGER · DIFFERENT · DROPPED · ERROR · FETCHING FINISHED · GOOD · HEAR · HUG · INTERPRETING · INTERRUPT IRONY · LESS · LETTER · MORE · MOVE · NO · NUMBERS (1,2,3,) OKAY · PAYMENT · QUESTION · READY · RECEIPT · ROMANTIC SIGNATURE · SPEECH · STAND UP · STOP · TICKET · TIME · TOILET WAIT · WHAT · YES
Haptic signals — 139 new and known signals

... is a reference book with haptic signals used by deafblind people, people with hearing and visual impairments, contact persons, relatives and interpreters in Denmark. The book also comes in a Danish version.

With haptic signals deafblind people can get information that other people get visually. This provides a better opportunity for participating actively and equally in social interaction. We hope that the use of haptic signals will become a natural part of every day life for all deafblind people and people with hearing and visual impairments.

In this book previously published and new signals are described and illustrated. The book can be used for educational purpose or by anyone who wishes to learn the signals on their own.

You can also find the haptic signals in an app for Android and iPhone. Find it under the name Haptic Signals in your app store.

The signals also come in a text version and a pdf version on FDDB’s website, www.fddb.dk