

Communication Strategies with Hearing Loss

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Strategies for Listeners with Hearing Loss

- Be certain that the speaker is facing you.
- Turn down or off extraneous devices, such as the TV, to insure the best possible listening environment.
- Situate yourself in a well-lit area; focal lights should be on the speaker and not directed toward you. This will help you pick up visual clues from the speaker, such as facial expressions and lip movements.
- Be assertive when in a group – let those gathered know that you would appreciate if they take turns speaking as opposed to holding multiple conversations.
- If you are having difficulty understanding something, ask the speaker to rephrase the message, as repeating verbatim does not always improve understanding.
- Don't bluff; that is, don't pretend that you understood something the speaker said when in fact you did not. Others pick up on this and may become frustrated, annoyed or angered by your response, especially if it is inappropriate to the conversation.
- Be assertive! Tell your spouse, friends, family and co-workers how best to talk to you. For some it may be asking for repetition, for others it may be asking to rephrase. You can always check to see if you are following correctly by asking "Did you say . . .".
- If you have considerable difficulty understanding speech, consider asking the speaker to announce the topic of discussion, especially if it is changed.
- Using written communication via pen or electronic device may be the only means of effective communication with some speakers.
- If you rely heavily on visual cues (i.e., lip reading) you may become fatigued over time. Meetings can be especially taxing so arrange to take breaks at regular intervals.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt in misunderstandings --you may have missed a response or perhaps did not hear an exchange as intended.
- Understand that a loved one's hearing loss is painful for everyone—it's losing a part of that person and a familiar way of relating to them.

Strategies for Speakers Talking to Someone with Hearing Loss

- Be certain you get the listener's attention before you speak. This may include a gentle tap on the shoulder. The hearing-impaired cannot multi-task (like cook) and hear.
- Be sure to face the person you are speaking to with any focal light facing you, not the listener.
- Don't attempt to speak from more than 10 feet away from the listener, from behind, or when walking or riding beside the listener. Keep in mind to always face the listener.
- Avoid background noise by moving to a quieter location or turning down extraneous volumes on TV and radio. You may have to turn off fans or air-conditioning.
- Enunciate clearly – especially consonants; speak slowly. Speak in a normal tone – don't shout. Don't drop your voice, especially at the ends of sentences (and very especially when you are telling a joke!).
- Watch your listener. If it appears that you are not being understood in general, ask your listener if there are some changes in your delivery that would help them follow you. If some particular phrase is not getting across, try rewording the message – repeating verbatim may not enhance understanding if it was missed the first time.
- Cue the listener in when you change subjects.
- Keep your hands and other objects including food, gum, cigarettes etc. away from your face when speaking.
- Use facial expressions and gestures.
- Be patient, positive and relaxed.
- Please refrain from being dismissive by saying such things as “oh, never mind”. Nothing is more hurtful or isolating to the listener with hearing loss as when others cut off communication because the listener is struggling to follow along.
- When dealing with a person who has hearing aids, establish if they have them in or not. Some people can hear very little without them but do well in conversation when they are in and time is taken to adjust them properly.
- ENJOY THE INTERACTIONS YOU CAN HAVE! Learning more communication skills is just another way of making more interesting, rewarding interactions possible for you both.