

Supporting a deaf or hard of hearing work colleague or employee

Are you working with a deaf or hard of hearing colleague or is someone working for you who is deaf or hard of hearing or do you know someone who is working with a deaf or hard of hearing person?

You can help them by providing support in practical ways and understand more about deafness. We hope this information will help you to make that first step towards supporting a deaf person.

How do I know if a person is deaf or hard of hearing?

There are many different levels of deafness. A person's deafness can range between hard of

hearing through to profoundly deaf.

A person who is hard of hearing, may ask you to repeat what you are saying again because they have not heard everything you have said. Some may only miss a few words others might miss whole sentences. Some may not hear low tones or high tones very well, so their ability to hear different people will vary.

If a person has a strong accent this will be difficult for someone with deafness to hear the words clearly.

Much depends on what type of hearing loss they have. You might be able to pick up a difference in their speech or you may see a deaf person gesturing with their hands, using sign language. However, not all deaf people use sign language.

You may notice that they wear one or two hearing aids, some may not have a hearing aid prescribed yet because they have very mild deafness. Some profoundly deaf people do not use hearing aids as they do not help.

Each hearing aid is different, some are more powerful than others, hearing aids are programmed to suit the individual person's needs.

Most deaf or hard of hearing people will need to lip-read as well as using their hearing aids.

Hearing aids do not give full hearing back. Hearing aids will only help a deaf and hard of hearing person to hear better.

However, profoundly deaf people normally will not be wearing hearing aids for conversations. They will wear hearing aids to be more aware of their environment, such as picking up loud noises.

If there are so many different levels of deafness, how can I help?

There are many things you can help with. The first thing you can do is learn how to improve your communication with your work colleague or employee. The worse thing you can do is to ignore them.

Many people will be tempted to ignore a deaf or hard of hearing person because they are not aware of **how** to help a person with deafness.

Follow our communication tips below to get started;

Communication tips

There are some basic adjustments you can make that will help with communication.

- STOP what you are doing.
- FACE your colleague to get their attention.
- LOOK to make eye contact.

- SMILE relax and take your time. Put your colleague at ease.
- MOVE away from noise or any distractions.
- Speak NORMALLY but not fast.
- Make sure there is NO LIGHT behind you. Your face will be dark if you are standing in front of a window or lamp.
- REPEAT using different words if your colleague did not understand you the first time. Don't get irritated!
- WRITE down important instructions.

Communication is so important to all deaf or hard of hearing people. For all of us if we cannot communicate we would become isolated, this can lead to anxiety and depression.

For a deaf or hard of hearing person, in a work place, trying to follow conversations, to understand what they are

supposed to do in their job and to keep up with their peers, is extremely tiring and often stressful. They will be using their eyes all the time, watching for movements around them, reading lips and watching your body language and facial expressions. They will pick up if someone is frustrated with them or irritated because they have to repeat.

Making these adjustments will go a long way to help reduce the stress and make them feel relaxed and help build their confidence up.

It is important that any deaf or hard of hearing colleague is able to approach you to ask questions or to clarify any information they are not sure about.

If they sense you are uncomfortable, many deaf and hard of hearing people will suffer in silence and will become anxious to approach you, in case they are a bother.

What can we do to support them in their job?

There are many deaf and hard of hearing people who are very successful in their jobs. They do not need to be limited in their job provided they are given the support they need.

Below are some examples of support;

Customer Service Advisor working in a call centre who is hard of hearing and wears hearing aids. *There are equipment that can be purchased to help this person on the telephone. Headsets with amplifiers that work with hearing aids can be purchased from many suppliers. These headsets can work in conjunction with the hearing aid to help cut out background noise and increase volume and clarity.*

Warehouse worker who is profoundly deaf. *A workplace buddy could be assigned to this*

person to make sure if there is a fire alarm they can make sure they are made aware. There are vibrating pagers or visual alarms that could be installed to help alert them.

Where can we get help to make sure we are providing the right support?

Contact us on the details at the end of this FACTsheet. We can help and guide you through the process. We also have a range of communication support services that can help you get the best support for your deaf or hard of hearing colleague or employee/s.

You can also check out our website for more information and FACTsheets.

www.ideaflife.weebly.com

Look out for our communication tips poster you can print off to put up in your staff room to help create awareness with all your staff members.

iDeaf - London Deaf Information Service bringing a change to the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people.

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