

Communication Tips for people with Hearing Loss

If you think you have a hearing problem, seek help from an audiologist or an appropriate medical professional. Getting help will decrease your stress and sense of isolation. Even if you find it difficult to acknowledge you have trouble hearing, others probably all ready know. There is no shame in not hearing. Take whatever action you can to help yourself. You will feel better and your family and friends will thank you!

Set up your environment to your advantage. Pick your best place in a room. Avoid sitting near electrical motors such as air conditioners, water coolers, refrigerators, food displays etc. Your hearing aid will magnify the sound and make it difficult or impossible to hear conversation. Choose quiet carpeted restaurants; arrange to eat at the quietist time, often when the restaurant opens. Sit in a booth rather than at a table. The back of the booth will help stop the noise from behind you. If a table is the only option sit with your back to the wall. Round tables are better than rectangular tables. Avoid sitting in the middle of the room at all cost. It will be noisy and often impossible to hear.

Call ahead (or email) when making plans at a theatre, house of worship or other large venue. Ask if the place for the event has an Assistive Listening System. Knowing the system used will tell you if you should bring your neckloop or if the telecoil (“T” switch) will be sufficient. Ask the procedure for obtaining a receiver or headset if you’ll need one. If no system is available it’s an opportunity to advocate for accommodation. You will be helping yourself and others.

Be sure window or room lighting is on the face of the speaker, and not in your eyes, which will make speech reading less stressful. Don’t be shy about requesting a change seats with someone. Maximizing your chance of understanding conversation may help the flow of conversation.

Put yourself as close to the speaker as possible.

Pay attention. Concentrate on the speaker and watch for visual clues, such as facial expression, gestures etc. You may be able to “fill in the blanks” by observation. Try to go to an event well rested.

Compiled by Michelle Gross 2011

Give feedback. Let the speaker know if you are hearing her/him. If you cannot hear suggest to the hearing person what they can do to help. Remember someone with normal hearing doesn't know how you hear. People with normal hearing don't understand that an increase in volume doesn't compensate for poor intelligibility. They may feel your hearing aids or implant cure your hearing. By providing a suggestion you take the burden and guesswork out of the situation.

Don't bluff. If you can't understand, ask the person to repeat or rephrase what they have said. Tell the person have a hearing loss, or don't hear well or use whatever label you use so they know why you may seem "out of touch".

Avoid making your spouse/friend/relative your translator. Asking someone to help you understand once in a while is fine however; it's a strain and annoying for a hearing person to constantly have to translate for you. Do whatever you can to help yourself and not rely totally on the good nature of your spouse, children or friends.

Be sure you are using your hearing aid and other assistive devices whenever possible. Use the "T" switch on your hearing aid or implant, use an amplified, captioned or web telephone/ service, "regular" relay, email or whatever you need to carry on your business, whenever possible. If you have a "personal listener", use it whenever you think it will help.

Be kind to yourself. Remember, you are not alone having a hearing loss. Listening is tiring. You may need to rest your eyes. There will be times when you may feel isolated, depressed or anxious. Having those feelings from time to time happens with most hard of hearing people. If those episodes are frequent and are interfering with your life you may want to seek help or discuss those feelings with others with hearing loss. If you need a "break" take one then return to the situation.

Think about joining the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)

Sharing information and coping strategies with others who understand your situation can be excellent medicine. You will have a chance to share "tips" and "work arounds" with others, interact with people who care about you and will do what they need to do to enjoy comfortable communication. You'll have the opportunity to make new friends, share good times, and participate in helping others as well.