

Tips for communicating with a person with a hearing loss

Be sure you have the attention of the person with a hearing loss before carrying on a conversation. Getting the person's attention will save a lot of repetition. Approach a person with hearing loss from a point of peripheral vision or call their name first as you move toward them. Avoid touching the persons' arm or shoulder unless the person already knows you are there. It can be startling. A firm step when entering a room or flashing a room light, may be helpful. A wave of the hand may also help

Face the person with hearing loss and stand close enough for them to see you. If the person wears a hearing aid or cochlear implant, do not try to talk into the person's earpiece or lean so close that they cannot see your face. Talking loudly into a hearing instrument will often cause distortion and not seeing your face limits lip reading ability.

Be sure the light is on your face. Please make sure the light/sun is not shining in the eyes of the person with a hearing loss. Lip reading becomes difficult or impossible

Speak in a normal tone and volume. If you sense that speaking just a bit louder will help, adjust accordingly but please don't shout.

State the topic of discussion as you begin. When you change the topic, make sure the listener is aware of the change. It's embarrassing for someone with a hearing loss to comment on a conversation, which has moved to another topic. It may take a bit longer for a person with a hearing loss to process information and therefore their response may appear off topic.

Please enunciate normally. Over enunciating distorts facial and lip movements which will inhibit lip reading.

Speak a little more slowly if you are a fast talker. When a person speaks in logical word groups, intelligibility is greatly increased.

If a person with hearing loss does not understand you at first, try once more. If they still don't understand, rephrase your statement. For example, "What is your address?" might become "Where do you live?" Not everyone can read lips, and even the best speech readers miss or confuse words since many look the same when spoken.

Realize when a person has a hearing loss they will have difficulty in groups or noisy places. If necessary, move to quieter surroundings or sit next to the person so they don't feel isolated.

Please, don't talk with cigarettes, pipes, food, etc. in your mouth and don't cover your mouth with hands or other objects when talking.

Please be patient. Remember, people with hearing loss don't want to impose on you anymore than you enjoy putting forth extra effort to be understood.

Please don't say "I'll tell you later", unless you will do so. Saying "it's not important" can also make that person feel isolated, especially knowing "I'll tell you later" almost never happens. A few words of summary can help

Don't make someone with hearing loss feel stupid, helpless or imply their hearing loss is intentional. Please do not tell the person they have "selective hearing". Being able to understand speech is not a matter of choice. Some words or statements are harder to hear and understand than others and the acoustics of a room as well as background noise can influence if a person with hearing loss will hear and understand what you say.

Try to show facial expressions and body expressions when you speak. Language may sound "flat" to some people, which may cause them to misinterpret the tone of a conversation.

Remember that hearing and understanding are work for people who can't hear. Hearing is not a passive event as it is for people with hearing loss. Straining to hear is tiring and people may become irritable and make "mistakes" more likely.

When going to a restaurant allow the HH person to select their seat first. Sitting at a table in the middle of a room often makes understanding speech impossible. Booth seating with the light on the hearing person's face, can help greatly.

If you are unsure of how you can help a person with hearing loss, feel free to ask. Even if there isn't too much you can do the thought will be appreciated.