

Tips for Improving Communication with People Who Have a Hearing Loss

Family and friends play an important role in the life of a person with hearing loss. Advancements in hearing technology have helped to assure that even those persons with profound hearing loss can fully participate through spoken language. Hearing loss is variable and not all strategies outlined below may be relevant for the individual with whom you have contact. Be sensitive to their individual needs and to their desire to not be “singled out”, especially in front of a group. With a little understanding and a few minor adjustments to your typical communication style, you can make a difference in their ability to fully participate and enjoy group conversation and activities.

Things that help:

- Be sure to have the person’s attention before you begin to speak by saying their name clearly and making eye contact before beginning to speak. If possible, provide a frame of reference for the discussion by mentioning the topic at the outset.
- Look in the direction of the person with hearing loss, making sure your face can clearly be seen. Standing in front of a window with backlighting makes it difficult to see your face. Make sure there is adequate light so that the movements of your lips and facial expressions can be clearly seen.
- If the person doesn’t understand you, try to say the sentence in another way by rephrasing or repeating your idea substituting different vocabulary. Avoid talking really fast.
- Be sure to speak in your normal tone of voice. Sometimes people with a hearing loss may be partly dependent on lip-reading because even with technological support, some sounds are still not picked up. By rephrasing a sentence, it may make it easier for the person to understand. Use appropriate facial expressions, gestures and body language to assist with your communication.
- Extend extra consideration when you are in a group. Common courtesy is that only one person should be talking at a time. It helps if the person with a hearing loss is

alerted to a change in speakers by a visual cue e.g. a hand signal or a gesture or saying the speaker's name.

- Be aware of competing noises or sounds. Air conditioners, music, cafeteria noise, other people talking and even wind noise, can all interfere with the ability to hear the speaker. Ideally, move away from the noise so that your voice can be more easily heard or stand closer to sound absorbing materials, like a booth in a restaurant, a corner in a crowded room or against a wall.
- Some people with hearing loss may hear only parts of a verbal message. For many people who are hard of hearing, low frequency speech sounds such as (a), (o) and (u) may be clearly heard, while other high-frequency sounds such as (s), (th), and (sh) may be much less distinct. In this situation, speech is heard but often misunderstood. "Watch" may be mistaken for "wash", "fin" for "shin" and "pen" for "spent."

Things that don't help:

- Avoid shouting at a person who has a hearing loss. Some hearing aid and cochlear implant users are especially sensitive to loudness. Don't let paper or other objects like jewelry rest against a personal f.m. system.
- Avoid distracting movements such as smoking, chewing or putting your hands in front of your face.
- Do not speak too quickly or exaggerate your lip movements.