



C O N N E C T I C U T

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M E D I C A L A N D S U R G I C A L S P E C I A L I S T S

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## **COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR SPEAKING TO PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS**

Appendix 10-1 Compiled by Samuel Trychin, John Greer Clark, and Marjorie Boone

1. Be sure to get the hard-of-hearing person's attention before you speak. Saying the person's name and waiting for an acknowledgment before beginning can greatly decrease your need for repetitions. Similarly, keep in mind that the individual with a hearing loss may not hear the soft sounds of someone entering the room. Calling the person's name as you are approaching or knocking on the door (even if it is open) is a gentle means of alerting the individual that someone is coming.
2. The speaker should never speak directly into the ears of someone with a hearing loss, since this of course makes it impossible for the listener to make use of visual cues. Research has shown that the addition of visual cues can raise the intelligibility of received speech by approximately 20%.
3. Do not put obstacles in front of your face and always speak without anything in your mouth. Pipes, cigarettes, pencils, eyeglass frames, chewing gum, and so on, are distracting to those with hearing loss who may be using visual cues from the speaker's lips and face.
4. Speak clearly and decrease your speech to a slow-normal rate to allow the listener to "catch up." Pausing between sentences can also be helpful.
5. Do not hesitate to ask the listener if you are speaking at an effective level. Typically it is helpful to speak slightly louder than normal, but do not shout. Too much loudness can actually distort the speech signal in an ear with hearing loss.
6. Use facial expressions and gestures to supplement what you are saying. Facial expressions do not mean over-articulation. Over-articulation not only distorts the sounds of speech, but also the speaker's face, making the use of visual cues more difficult. Everyone reads lips (known today as "speech reading"). Some do this more proficiently than others, but we all do it, either consciously or subconsciously. Facial expressions and gestures help clarify the message seen on the lips. To maximize these non-verbal signals, be sure there is adequate lighting on your face. Remember that for the hard of hearing, face-to-face communication is a must, with an optimal distance for communication exchange between 3 to 6 feet.
7. Alert the listener with a hearing loss that the subject is shifting when changing topics during group or individual conversations. A statement such as the following can be helpful: "We're talking about last night's Red's game, Tom."
8. If the person with a hearing loss does not appear to understand what is being said, try rephrasing the statement rather than simply repeating the misunderstood words. Quite often the same one or two words in the sentence will continue to be missed during each repetition. Rephrasing eliminates many frustrations. This is extremely important, but much too often overlooked.
9. Avoid conversation if the television or radio is playing, or if the dishwasher is running, and so on. If you are talking with a person who has a hearing loss, invite that person to move with you to the other side of the room where it might be less noisy.
10. Talk to hard-of-hearing people, not about them. Too often hearing family members may avoid the need to repeat by talking around the person with a hearing loss. "How is Uncle John doing?" may be directed to Aunt Mary while John is 2 feet away. In such instances, the hard-of-hearing person becomes, at best, a marginal member in any group situation.
11. Communication with a hard-of-hearing person can be difficult at times. If you can follow these guidelines and remain patient, positive, and relaxed, you will find the benefits worthwhile. When you become impatient, negative, and tense, communication will become more difficult.
12. When in doubt, ask the hard-of-hearing person for suggestions about ways to improve communication.



## **COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS**

Appendix 10-2 Compiled by Samuel Trychin, John Greer Clark, and Marjorie Boone

1. Dimly lit and noisy areas can create difficult listening situations even for those with normal hearing. For those with hearing loss such areas can greatly increase the listening difficulties encountered. Whenever possible, if you find yourself in a poorly lit or noisy area, invite your communication partner to an area more appropriate for conversing.
2. With a little preplanning it is often possible to anticipate difficult listening situations and thereby lessen their impact. As an example, if going out for dinner make reservations for a less busy (noisy) time and tell the host you would like a seat in a well-lit area away from high-traffic areas. Similarly, arriving early to a meeting or lecture will allow you to select a seat that may allow you to hear better.
3. When you misunderstand what has been said, do not simply ask for repetition. Tell the speaker you have a hearing loss and what is helpful to you (i.e., "Please face me when you talk, and speak slightly slower and a little louder.").
4. When hearing is difficult, it is easy to allow the mind to wander. Practice paying close attention to the speaker at all times. Paying close attention can sometimes be exhausting. Therefore, arrange for frequent breaks if discussions or meetings are expected to run long.
5. Although you may have had no formal training in speech reading (lip reading), research has demonstrated that the addition of visual cues to what the ear hears can increase understanding as much as 20%. Always strive for a clear, unobstructed view of the speaker's face. An optimal distance for communication exchange is 3 to 6 feet.
6. Important instructions, information, or key words such as addresses, telephone numbers, measurements, dollar figures, and so on, should always be written out to avoid confusion.
7. Let others know when you do or do not understand what has been said. Keep in mind that "Huh?" "What?" "Please repeat that" are all ineffective in that they do not tell the speaker what would be helpful. Statements such as "Please raise the volume of your voice," "Please face me when you talk to me," or "I need you to slow down a little" are all much more effective.
8. Try not to interrupt too often. How frequently to interrupt calls for a great deal of judgment, but always try to be as unobtrusive as possible. Sometimes a prearranged hand signal for the speaker to slow down, speak up, or to move a hand from in front of the face, and so on, can be useful.
9. Provide feedback to those who talk with you to let them know how well they are doing. No one likes to hear only about what is wrong. "Your voice volume and speed are just right; I'm understanding everything you are saying" provides a nice verbal "pat on the back" as well as important information to the speaker about how best to communicate.
10. Do not bluff! Bluffing robs you of opportunities to practice good communication skills. The risk of not informing others about your hearing loss is an increase in the occurrence of misinterpretations and the possibility of damaged relationships.
11. Set realistic goals about what you can expect to understand. If you are in a nearly impossible listening situation, it may be best to relax and ride it out. More manageable listening settings will be forthcoming.
12. Remember that hearing aids have limitations. Often the use of additional assistive listening devices can turn an impossible listening situation into one that is possible.