



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.