



## 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.