

Communication Strategies

Tips for Family and Friends

Communicating with individuals who have hearing loss can present challenges, and requires patience and understanding from friends and family. However, using certain communication strategies can significantly enhance communication for both the individual with hearing loss and their conversation partner. By implementing the following techniques when speaking to someone with hearing loss, communication can become a more seamless and positive experience.

**Good communication
requires effort,
patience, and
understanding
from both individuals
involved.**

Visual Cues

Speech

Background
Noise

Other Tips

Visual Cues

Visual cues, such as lip reading and facial movements, play a vital role in communicating with individuals who have hearing loss. They provide valuable additional information alongside speech. It's worth noting that even individuals with normal hearing rely on visual cues to fill in the gaps when speech is unclear. For people with hearing loss, these visual cues can make a significant difference in their understanding of speech.

Get their Attention

- Before initiating a conversation, it is crucial to get the person's attention.
- A gentle touch or a wave can signal your intention to communicate, reducing confusion and misunderstandings.

Face-to-Face Communication

- Position yourself directly in front of the person with hearing loss, ensuring they have a clear view of your face.
- Maintaining eye contact throughout the conversation facilitates better understanding.
- Avoid speaking from other rooms or turning your face away, as this reduces visual cues.
- Do not cover your mouth- keep your hands away from your face, and consider how eating, drinking and smoking make visual cues difficult to follow.

Adequate lighting

- Good lighting is essential and ensures the listener can observe visual cues.
- Avoid standing in front of bright light sources, such as windows, as they can obscure your face.
- Select well-lit environments when going out, as dimly lit places, such as certain restaurants and bars, may make communication difficult for an individual with hearing loss.

Incorporate Gestures and Facial Expressions

- Utilize gestures, pointing, and facial expressions to convey meaning and provide additional context for the listener.

 Speech

Raising your voice or speaking slower often doesn't improve understanding for individuals with hearing loss. In fact, it can have the opposite effect. Since people with hearing loss heavily rely on visual cues for additional information, exaggerating mouth movements or distorting speech can make it more challenging for them to comprehend. It is therefore best to speak in a normal, clear manner.

Clear Speech

- Speak clearly and enunciate without raising your voice, as it can distort speech and make understanding more difficult.
- Maintain a moderate pace, allowing the individual to follow along.
- Avoid altering mouth movements or speech patterns, as this can make lip-reading difficult.
- Give clear indication when you switch to another topic.

Repeat and Rephrase

- If you are asked to repeat yourself, do so without frustration.
- Reacting negatively may discourage further conversation.
- If you are asked multiple times to repeat yourself, try rephrasing your statement rather than repeating the same words.

 **Background
Noise****Background Noise**

Although background noise is almost always present, minimizing it whenever possible can significantly improve communication outcomes. Creating a quieter environment allows individuals with hearing loss to focus more on speech and enhances their ability to understand and engage in conversation.

Minimize Background Noise

- Pausing or turning down the TV or radio before speaking to an individual with hearing loss will improve their ability to understand you.
- Vacuum cleaners, air-conditioners, running water/kitchen noises, and even traffic all contribute to background noise and may make it difficult for individuals with hearing

loss to understand. Move away from loud noise sources and choose quieter areas for conversations.

Reduce Distance

- Speech is more difficult to understand over a longer distance. Reduce the space between you and your communication partner to give them a better chance of understanding you when there is background noise.



Other Tips to Remember

When communicating with someone with hearing loss, it is important to recognise that it can be a challenging experience, particularly when their communication partners do not adopt strategies to make communication easier.

Listening with hearing loss requires effort, and factors such as poor visual cues, distorted speech, and background noise can further complicate comprehension. Whilst hearing aids may help, remember that they have limitations and cannot fully restore an individual's hearing to normal levels.

Here are a few additional key points to consider:

Listening Effort and Fatigue

- Listening when you have a hearing loss requires effort, so conversations can become tiring.
- It is more difficult for a person to listen when they are tired, sick, or have been engaged in conversation for a long time.
- If you notice signs of fatigue when communicating with a person with hearing loss, postpone the conversation until they are ready to continue.

Alternative Communication Methods

- If communication is particularly difficult, it may be best to resort to writing or typing important information.
- Speech-to-text apps which work in real-time can be used to facilitate communication.
- Using a [Hearing Help Card](#) (available from Hearing Matters Australia website)

Adapt to Individual Preferences

- Respect the person's preferred communication methods. Some individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, or assistive devices like captioning or sign language interpreters.
- Adapt your communication style accordingly to accommodate their needs.

Patience and Understanding

- Recognize that communication can be challenging for individuals with hearing loss.
- Exercise patience, understanding, and empathy throughout the conversation.
- Avoid rushing or dismissing the person's requests for clarification, as it may cause them to feel isolated.

Remember, it's **unrealistic** to expect a person with hearing loss to understand speech perfectly, even if they wear hearing aids. Good communication requires effort, patience, and understanding from both individuals involved.

Support Guides are shared by HMA as a service to members and those in the community who have an interest in hearing loss. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided, however HMA accepts no responsibility for any adverse consequences arising from the contents of these sheets. HMA information sheets are for personal use only. Downloads and printing allowable for whole sheets. Contact HMA with queries or amendments.

Find out more and join HMA for additional member benefits at www.hearingmattersaustralia.org