



Communication with Hearing Impaired Volunteers

Communicating with a person who does not hear well need not be difficult. A few simple rules will help.

For someone with a hearing impairment, it is not a case of 'hearing when they want to', but rather a case of 'hearing when they can'. A person with a hearing loss will be struggling to make sense of an incomplete puzzle so communication will be made easier by following these simple tips.

Face the person: Gain their attention before you speak and make sure they can see your face clearly.

Keep lips clear: To aid lip-reading keep hands away from the face and ensure that moustaches, food or other objects are not obscuring the mouth.

Ensure good lighting: Lighting should be on the speaker's face and not dazzling the listener.

Give them clues: Provide the topic of conversation so they know what they may expect.

Avoid background noise: Keep background noise to a minimum – shut doors or windows, turn off radios, fans or air conditioners if possible.

Speak clearly and a little slower: No need to shout as this distorts your voice and can be intimidating. Slow down a little, pause between sentences or phrases, and wait to make sure you have been understood before going on.

Position yourself by their "better" ear: If the hearing impaired listener hears better in one ear, try to make a point of remembering which ear is better so that you will know where to position yourself.

Don't assume: Even if someone is wearing hearing aids it doesn't mean they can hear you perfectly. Ask if they need to lip-read. Hearing aids do NOT restore 'normal' hearing.

Get to the point: Keep the language simple and get to the point.

Pay attention to the listener: A puzzled look may indicate misunderstanding. Tactfully ask the hearing impaired person if they understood you, or ask leading questions so you know your message got across.

Talk directly to the person: If you are using a sign language interpreter, always remember to talk directly to the person you are communicating with, not the interpreter.

Never speak from another room: it is almost impossible to hear around corners if you have a hearing loss!

Rephrase instead of repeating: When there is a difficulty with a word or phrase, try saying it a little differently.

Be aware of possible distortion of sounds: The hearing impaired person may hear your voice, but still have difficulty understanding some words.

Reduce the volume: Some people with hearing loss are very sensitive to loud sounds so where possible, avoid situations where there will be loud noises.

Repeat back: If you are giving specific information such as time, place or phone numbers, have the person repeat the specifics back to you or write it down.

In a group, focus on everyone: If you're talking to a group that includes deaf and hearing people; don't just focus on the hearing people.

Use natural gestures: Pointing and gesturing may aid understanding.

If in a group, only speak one at a time: More than one person speaking adds to confusion.

Don't ever say "It doesn't matter"! There is nothing more isolating and frustrating for the hearing impaired than hearing these three words.

Last but not least, be patient and try not to interrupt!