GOOD COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WHEN TALKING WITH SOMEONE WITH A HEARING LOSS...

"Loss of vision isolates you from objects. Loss of hearing isolates you from people." Helen Keller

Hearing loss can be very frustrating – for the person with the loss, and the family and friends trying to communicate with them. There are things the person with a hearing loss can do, such as use a hearing aid, to aid their understanding of conversation. However, communication takes two people, and family and friends can do things to make conversation easier (regardless of whether or not the person with the hearing loss has a hearing aid!)

Be in the same room – It is unrealistic to expect someone with a hearing loss to hear a conversation from another room, yet how often do we try this? It may be calling out from the kitchen to ask if they'd like a cup of tea, or telling someone you're just ducking out to the neighbour's as you head out the door. Make sure you are in the same room and facing each other when you speak.

Get their attention – We can all get absorbed in what we are doing, whether it is reading the paper, or washing the dishes. People with a hearing loss are already trying to play "catch up" in conversations; if you start talking to them before they are ready they will miss even more of the conversation

Face each other – Most people "lip-read' to some extent. Have you ever noticed how you tend to watch people's faces more intently when you are talking in a noisy place? It is extremely difficult to follow a conversation lip-reading alone as many sounds look the same on the lips. However, people with a hearing loss can use information such as lip patterns, facial expression, gestures etc. to help "fill in the blanks" in their hearing, so make sure you face each other.

Speak slowly and clearly – Slowing down your rate of speech helps to make each word distinct, and the slights gaps in speech allow people with a hearing loss more time to process the sounds they are hearing. People are often tempted to shout at someone with a hearing loss, but it is usually the worst thing you can do! Shouting tends to distort your voice, and it is hard to shout for long without sounding aggressive. Face the person with the hearing loss and speak directly to them in a loud, clear voice.

Reduce background noise – People with a hearing loss often have a poorer tolerance for background noise, or find it harder to pick one voice out from other noises. It is often possible to reduce noise by turning the TV or radio down, shutting a door or window to block out extraneous sounds, or moving to a quieter area.

Improve the environment - Soft furnishings e.g. a blanket under the tablecloth, a rug on the floor, or curtains instead of blinds, can help to absorb background noise and reduce reverberation, improving the sound quality in the room.

Say it another way – If someone is having difficulty understanding a particular word or sound, it is probably pointless to keep repeating it! Try rephrasing what you say, and avoid unnecessary words and jargon. Giving a visual cue (e.g. pointing at an item, or writing a word or two on a piece of paper) may help the person recognize the topic of conversation. Understanding the topic or context of a conversation can make a big difference to how much you can follow.

Write it down – If repeating or rephrasing doesn't help, try writing down one or two key points – this can help provide context for the rest of the conversation and/or ensure that important information e.g. an address or medication instruction is correctly understood.

Have realistic expectations – people with "normal hearing" do not hear 100% of a conversation 100% of the time, especially in large groups or noisy places. People with a hearing loss are listening through a damaged auditory system; for some people this means that the quality of their hearing is very poor and it is almost like listening to a badly tuned radio.

More concentration and effort is required to understand conversation when you have a hearing loss. It may be harder to do this when tired or feeling unwell

Hearing aids are just that – "aids" to hearing, not cures for hearing loss. Whilst hearing aids can significantly improve someone's hearing they do not restore hearing to normal - sounds from the hearing aid still need to travel along the damaged auditory pathway to the brain.

Help them out – Ask the person with the hearing loss what works best for them. Maybe it is moving to a quieter room, or maybe it is clueing them in to the conversation around them. Be patient and understanding!

Attend appointments – it can be very helpful for family members (or friends) to attend audiology appointments (with the client's permission!). We can give you both some tips and strategies for improving communication. It can be helpful to learn more about a person's hearing loss, hearing aids and recommendations that have been made. Your audiologists are here to help!

Just call us at

1300 TO HEAR

Or visit us

www.australianaudiology.com.au

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