



# Listening and Communication Strategies

Effective communication with others when you have hearing loss can be challenging. Hearing aids are extremely helpful devices that are finely tuned to improve communication abilities, but remember that we are still dealing with a damaged auditory system, therefore it's helpful to understand additional ways to improve communication with your friends and family.

## 1. Tell Others How Best to Talk to You

First, explain your hearing loss so that the other person understands the problem. Advise people to speak into your better ear, slow down the discussion, and duck away from noisy backgrounds if possible. People are generally happy to help you in this way.

## 2. Pick Your Best Spot

"Case the joint." Pick out where you want to sit or stand for best conversation. Make sure the area is well lit, and you are furthest from background noise as possible, such as a loud band playing at a restaurant. Sit close to the person you are speaking with.

## 3. Anticipate Difficult Situations

Think ahead. Is this a meeting where you can get an advance agenda and list of participants? If you're at a party with guests you don't know, can you ask your host ahead of time for names and connections of special people, so that you won't get mixed up at introductions? A big, noisy event where you might ask a spouse or friend to act as an interpreter and be your "hearing sidekick"? This approach is one of problem solving. Consciously think through the expected problems, then see if you can come up with something or someone to help. You can't solve all potential hearing difficulties, but any alleviation is worth the effort.

## 4. Pay Attention

We all know that we have to watch, listen, and concentrate to follow a conversation, but depending on the subject, sometimes it's easy to daydream! Or, perhaps the person you're talking to is very soft spoken and it's a challenge to usually hear them, so you pretend for a short while. Don't! Try your very best to focus on the speaker, and ask for repetition if you truly aren't understanding what's being said.

## **5. Concentrate on Speaker**

Where conversation is the prime objective, watch the talker exclusively and let the background go. It's tempting to try and eavesdrop on someone else while you're talking to someone, but when you have hearing loss, it will take 100% of your effort to receive one message and one message alone, so don't waste your efforts trying to also hear what someone at the next table is saying.

## **6. Look for Visual Cues**

Watch for facial expressions, gesture, and body language, all of which are great signs for the way the conversation is going.

## **7. Let Conversation Flow**

Sometimes you pick up the missed key word a few sentences later, and suddenly it all makes sense. Give the other person a chance to talk first. However, if you are totally lost, don't keep pretending that you're following along. Explain, then ask for a repeat.

## **8. Give Feedback to Speaker**

Remember to react during the conversation, and assure the speaker that you are following along, or if you are not, make sure not to "fake it" for too long. When you have lost track of the conversation, a blank look and query of "pardon?" achieves nothing. The speaker doesn't know exactly what is to be pardoned, or what to do next. Much more effective is specifically saying something like, "I understood you were talking about future meeting schedules, but I didn't get all of the dates. Can you repeat those?" Always show appreciation for the efforts made to you.

## **9. Admit When You Don't Understand**

Bluffing- letting someone assume you understand when you did not- is a "cardinal sin" of most people with hearing impairment, and one that often leads to trouble, such as missed meetings or job assignments, social situations, even critical data such as medical or other emergency information that your doctor may be sharing with you. Face up to it because you can do a lot of damage to yourself by bluffing. When the communication is serious and you are not comprehending it, admit it.

## **10. Give Yourself a Break**

Auditory fatigue brought on by extreme concentration needed to follow a conversation has been mentioned previously. It's important to recognize that this is common with those who have hearing loss, and it's in everyone's favor to postpone a serious discussion until you are feeling up to it.