

Effective Communication, especially with the Hearing-Impaired

Successful communication requires the efforts of all people involved in a conversation. Even when a person with hearing loss utilizes hearing aids and active listening strategies, it is crucial that others involved in the communication process consistently use good communication strategies. The following strategies are effective ways of speaking to anyone, including the hearing-impaired:

- **Look directly at the person to whom you are talking**, on the same level and in good light whenever possible. Position yourself so that the light is shining on the speaker's face, not in the eyes of the listener.
- **Keep your hands away from your face while talking.** If you are eating, chewing, smoking, etc. while talking, your speech will be more difficult to understand.
- **Speak clearly, slowly, distinctly, but naturally, without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements.** Shouting distorts the sound of speech and may make speech reading more difficult. Words spoken a bit more slowly are clearer than those that are shouted.
- **Don't drop your voice at the end of sentences.**
- **Attract the person's attention before beginning a conversation.** One way to do this is to begin by addressing the person by name. This gives the listener a chance to focus attention and reduces the chance of missing words at the beginning of the conversation.
- **Avoid talking too rapidly.** Slow down a little, pause between sentences or phrases, and wait to make sure you have been understood before going on.

Special suggestions for speaking to the hearing-impaired:

- **Begin by acquainting the listener with the general topic of the conversation.** Avoid sudden changes of topic. If the subject is changed, tell the hearing-impaired person what you are talking about now. In a group setting, repeat questions or key facts before continuing with the discussion.
- If the hearing-impaired listener hears better in one ear than the other, try to make a point of remembering which ear is better so that you will **know where to position yourself.**
- Some people with hearing loss are very sensitive to loud sounds. This reduced tolerance for loud sounds is not uncommon. **Avoid situations where there will be loud sounds when possible and recognize that it may be difficult for someone to hear you in such circumstances.**
- Most hearing-impaired people have greater difficulty understanding speech when there is background noise, like radios, television, lawn mowing, and elevator music. Conversations in such circumstances are especially challenging for the hearing impaired. **Try to minimize extraneous noise when talking. If you are speaking in a situation where background sounds are unavoidable, move closer to the person you to whom are talking.**
- **Be aware of possible distortion of sounds for the hearing-impaired person.** They may hear your voice, but still may have difficulty understanding some words.
- The hearing impaired person may have difficulty understanding a particular phrase or word, so **try to say the same thing in two or more ways.** Rather than repeating the original words over and over, **try find different ways of saying the same thing.**
- **Whispering in a noisy environment is very difficult for a hearing-impaired person to understand.** In such circumstances, it would be better to write down what you have to say.

- If you are giving specific information -- such as time, place, phone numbers, or answers to questions -- to someone who is hearing impaired, **have them repeat the specifics back to you**. Many numbers and words sound alike.
- Whenever possible, **provide pertinent information in writing**, such as directions, schedules, work assignments, etc.
- **Recognize that everyone, especially the hearing-impaired, has a harder time hearing and understanding when ill or tired.**
- **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.
- **Take turns speaking** and avoid interrupting other speakers or speaking while someone else is talking.
- **Do not talk from another room.** Not being able to see each other when talking is a common reason people have difficulty understanding what is said.