

Communicating with Hearing Loss

Communication is vital to our everyday lives. We use it to form relationships, to learn, and to manage our way through the world. Living well with hearing loss may mean adapting the way you communicate. Learning successful communication strategies after hearing loss can give you the tools you need to keep relationships healthy and to feel connected to the world. Here are some ideas for communicating successfully with your hearing loss.

Be Direct about Your Hearing Loss

One of the simplest and most effective ways you can communicate successfully after hearing loss is to make sure people you talk to understand your need for clarity. If, during a conversation, you're confused about something, don't hesitate to ask questions to confirm the details. And don't be afraid to ask someone to repeat what they've said. The person you're talking to will appreciate your candor and will know to face you and enunciate clearly. By being honest about what's going on, you give yourself the opportunity to more fully participate in your conversations without feeling anxious.

Use Effective Listening Techniques

Whenever you're engaged in a conversation, remember to listen with both your eyes and your ears. It's important to use both what you see and what you hear to fully understand what is being communicated. Always face the person you're talking to, especially if there is background noise. And be sure to observe the speaker's body language. It can often provide visual cues that can help to fill in the gaps if you're missing a few words or phrases. Of course, you can also learn speech-reading, a technique that places a focus on watching lip movements, facial expressions and gestures to enhance your listening experience.

Say What You Need

Remember, your friends, co-workers, and loved ones want you to understand what they're saying as much as you do. If you find yourself straining to understand someone, try to figure out what's happening in the situation. And once you do, ask for what you need. Often, the speaker's communication style or environmental factors can get in the way of successful communication.

Ask yourself these questions...

Speaker's Communication Style: Are they speaking clearly? Loud enough? At an understandable pace? Are they facing you so that you can follow them visually?

Environmental Factors: Can you find a place with less background noise, better lighting conditions, face-to-face seating arrangements, and acoustics that reduce echoes?

By asking your friends and family to assist you in eliminating some of these issues, you can open the door to a more relaxed and comfortable communication experience.

Try Some Technology

Hearing aids not only can make sounds easier to hear, they can also reduce background noise, both of which can make conversations easier. If you don't have a hearing aid, check with your physician or an audiologist to learn about which devices are best for your specific hearing loss.

Simple adaptive strategies can help make your daily communication less stressful and more fulfilling. For instance, we all know a good phone conversation can leave you feeling more connected to the people in your life. If your hearing is getting in the way of staying in touch, getting the right phone equipment could be the answer to making phone calls more rewarding.

Plan Ahead

Planning ahead for the best listening conditions gives you the opportunity to ensure successful communication. Here's an example of planning for dining at a restaurant:

Suggest going at a time that won't be too crowded.

Arrive early to make arrangements that support conversation.

Recommend a restaurant that is relatively quiet, without loud music playing in the background, and with good lighting to allow you to see the faces of your guests.

Choose a table away from the kitchen, or in a quiet nook.

Try to read the menu online beforehand, so you will know what you want to order.

Sit with your back to a sunny window to reduce glare, so you can clearly see facial expressions and body language.

By addressing potential concerns in advance, you'll be able to feel more comfortable, to focus on your guests, and to communicate more freely.

Stay Positive!

It's easy to feel frustrated or insecure if you're having trouble communicating. However, negative emotions, such as anger, depression, or defeat, won't resolve the problem. It's far more effective to identify what you can do to improve conversations. Look at opportunities to communicate as a pleasure, and be patient with yourself. By adjusting your routine and exploring what technology has to offer, you may find that successful communication is easier than you thought.