



# HEARING MATTERS AUSTRALIA

Support from real life experience

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## MANAGING CONVERSATIONS WITH HEARING LOSS

If you feel you are missing out in conversation because of your hearing, there are steps you and others can take to improve the communication experience.

Listed below are some simple guidelines to assist hearing and communication whether or not you use hearing devices.

1. Stage manage the listening situation to your best advantage. Sit opposite the speaker rather than beside them, so that you can comfortably observe the whole situation. Avoid facing a window or bright light that may put the speaker's face in shadow.
2. Watch carefully, observing the whole expression of the person you wish to hear. Do not concentrate on the speakers' lips only.
3. Look for ideas, not single words. As you become familiar with each speaker, key words will emerge to help you to put the message together. Identify the topic, as soon as possible. Family and friends may learn to give you this information, or you may ask for clarification as to what is being discussed.
4. Re-wording: If you don't follow what has been said, ask the speaker to say the same thing in different words. However, if you have caught any part of the message, use it in a question to fill in the gaps. Use questions that ask WHEN – WHERE – HOW – WHY  
Example: "Will you meet me outside the station at 5 o'clock?"  
"Where did you want me to meet you?" or  
"When will you be at the station?"
5. Avoid saying "What?" "Beg Pardon?" or "EH?" These will prompt only a repetition of what you have already missed – and you'll probably miss it again.
6. Relax. Don't strain either to hear, or to see, speech. It is a combination of hearing and seeing that will help you most.
7. Remember that conversation is two-way. Do not monopolise it in order to stay in control.
8. Remember also that many people do not know how to communicate effectively with someone living with hearing loss. Put them at ease by telling them firstly that you do not hear well, and then what it is that they can do to help you manage better.

## TEACHING YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES HOW BEST TO HELP YOU IS ONE THING YOU CAN DO TO START COMMUNICATING MORE EFFECTIVELY.

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Communicating with a person who does not hear well does not have to be difficult. A few simple guidelines will help the person living with hearing loss to hear as well as possible in any given situation. Remember also that hearing loss results in having to make sense of an incomplete puzzle, and being tired, worried, or anxious makes listening more difficult. Other factors that make communication difficult is when background noise is present, if the speaker's face is in shadow, or if the speaker turns away.

Useful guidelines are:

1. **Gain Attention** – Call the person by name to attract his/her attention, or a gentle touch may help. Do not start speaking until the person knows he/she is being spoken to.
2. **Face Each Other** – Make sure your face can be seen clearly for facial expression and speechreading cues. Be sure to face the person, at about a metre or two away. Avoid shadows on your face (position yourself with the light in front of you)
3. **Avoid Background Noise** – It is not always possible to avoid background noise, but do remember that it is particularly necessary for you to take care in any noisy place. Turn off the TV, radio or music if that is making things difficult. Background noise that is made up of people speaking will be the most difficult environment in which to hear.
4. **Talk Normally** – Be careful not to cover your face, and to talk normally - if anything, just a little slower. Do not exaggerate lip movements and do not shout.
5. **Get To The Point** - Knowing the subject matter avoids misunderstandings. Briefly explain what, who, when, where and how.
6. **Rephrase** – Sometimes the key word will continue to be missed. If you are not understood, rephrase your sentence using different words. If this does not work, write down the sentence.

REMEMBER to check that you have been heard and provide opportunities for the person you are speaking with to ask for clarification. In cases where information exchange is critical, you can ask the person you are communicating with to repeat back what you've said to ensure the full message has been heard.

FINALLY, remember that a hearing device does not make any person hear normally. Many people with hearing devices also require effective communication strategies, such as those outlined above.

*Note: An earlier version of this paper was produced with the permission of Dr Jenny Rosen, former Head of the Department of Audiology, Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital.*