



Communicating with People who are Hard of Hearing

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Success in communicating with a hard of hearing person can often depend on circumstances. They may wear hearing aids, but still have problems with background noise, high or low tones or distortion. Looking at your face may help them understand what you say, but probably not if you are chewing gum, have a mustache, or are standing in a dark area. Here are some suggestions that may help you communicate better with a hard of hearing person:

- **Make sure you face the hard of hearing person.**
Even if you have a mustache or an accent, they will still hear you better if you don't turn away. Hard of hearing children will have a difficult time understanding the teacher if she is writing on the board with her back to them, and patients may be frustrated if their doctor is talking while writing a prescription with his head down. They won't be able to see facial expressions which are also an important part of communication.
- **Speak clearly, but don't shout or over-enunciate.**
Use an even, normal tone when you speak to a hard of hearing person. Shouting indicates you are angry or impatient and is embarrassing to both of you if you are in a public place.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.**
Make sure there is enough light in a room and don't stand in front of the light, which would make it hard to see your face. If you're at a gathering, you might want to find a quiet corner so that other conversations don't interfere. In an office environment, have your conversation away from noisy copiers or ringing phones.
- **If you have to repeat something, do so with patience.**
It is difficult for a hard of hearing person to ask you to repeat something, so if you need to, do so with patience and understanding. Maybe you can rephrase what was said. Don't just say "forget it!" and make the person feel bad for not understanding you.
- **Write if necessary.**
Clarify a word or phrase by writing it down, texting it on your phone or typing it on your tablet.

- **Take turns speaking.**
Whether you are in a classroom, meeting, or a dinner table, don't talk over each other. Take turns speaking and make sure the hard of hearing person is aware who is talking at the moment.
- **If asked to wear a transmitter, do!**
If the hard of hearing person has a hearing aid or cochlear implant with a telecoil, they may be able to hear you clearly with an assistive listening device (ALD) like an FM system. The speaker wears a transmitter or microphone and the hard of hearing person wears a receiver. This works well in classrooms, conferences, and even with just two people in a noisy restaurant.