



Between Friends

Thoughts on Caregiving

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Communication: How to Communicate With The Hearing Impaired

Hearing loss affects many older adults. A lifetime of everyday noises can lead to a slight loss, or one that might require a hearing aid.

There are two major types of hearing loss. When loss of intensity (loudness) is experienced, a person can still hear things clearly, but sounds aren't as loud. A hearing aid can often help this type of loss, because it makes sounds louder.

Some people, however, experience a loss in clarity. They still hear things, but the sounds they hear are distorted and fuzzy, like hearing a radio not quite tuned in to a station. A hearing aid will not help this type of hearing loss, because it only makes the fuzzy sounds louder.

There are, of course, people who suffer from a loss of intensity and clarity.

The following guidelines may be helpful in your efforts to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired. They are taken from Dr. Raymond R. Hull's "Thirteen Commandments for Talking to the Hearing Impaired Older Person."

1. Speak at a slightly greater than normal intensity -- a little louder than normal, but don't shout! Shouting calls attention to the individual and distorts your message.
2. Speak at a normal rate, but not too fast.
3. Speak to the person at a distance of between three and six feet.
4. Do not speak to the person unless you are visible to him or her and have her or his attention. Don't chew gum, smoke, eat or have anything in your mouth while communicating with the hearing impaired person. Extraneous mouth movements can interfere with lip reading efforts.
5. Do not force the person to listen to you when there is a great deal of noise around you. A noisy environment can be difficult for a person with normal hearing, and even more difficult for the person with hearing loss.
6. Never speak directly into a person's ear. This only further distorts what is being said, and prohibits the use of visual clues.
7. If the person does not appear to understand what is being said, re-phrase your statement rather than repeating the misunderstood words. If all else fails, write your message.
8. Do not exaggerate your words. Over-articulation not only distorts the sounds of speech, but also your face -- thus making the use of visual clues more difficult.
9. Include the hearing impaired person in all discussions about him or her in which he or she is present.
10. In meetings or any group activity where there is a speaker presenting information, make it mandatory that the speaker use the public address system. Many older people with hearing loss do not assert themselves by asking a speaker who has just said, "I am sure you can all hear me if I do not use the microphone."

A Friend's House Adult Day Services

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