

Tips for Communicating with Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing Individuals

Individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing (DHH) vary widely in how they communicate. Some rely on speech-reading, residual hearing, sign language, a combination of these, and other modes of communication. Always keep in mind that there is no “one size fits all.” Below are some general tips for communicating with someone with a hearing loss.

- Before speaking to the individual, make sure you have his/her attention.
- Speak clearly and at a normal pace; do not speak uncomfortably loud unless asked to do so.
- Do not over enunciate. Speak naturally.
- Do not cover your mouth or look around when speaking to the individual. Keep hands, food, etc. away from your mouth.
- As much as you can, keep your face visible. Keep in mind that when you turn around and speak with your back to the person, he/she may miss what you are saying.
- Do not assume all DHH individuals read lips. Individuals can read lips from 0% to 100% depending on several factors. Some of these factors are: the individual’s hearing loss, speech-reading abilities, the speaker’s mouth movement and speech patterns, the listening environment (background noise, etc.), lighting, pace of conversation, number of speakers, accents, and facial hair. Additionally, the individual’s familiarity with the subject matter can contribute to the success of the communication.
- Avoid standing directly in front of a light source. The light or glare may hinder the individual from seeing your face clearly.
- If the individual does not understand something you are saying, and you have already repeated it, try rephrasing the thought. Some words are more difficult to hear or to see on the lips.
- Try to use open-ended questions when appropriate. This can provide more opportunities for both parties to check for understanding throughout the conversation.
- Use pen and pencil, texting, or any keyboard as a tool.
- If the individual uses an interpreter, speak in the first person directly to the individual, rather than in the third person to the interpreter.
- If the individual does not hear you when you call on him/her, wave your hand or tap on shoulder to get his attention.

Tips More Specific to Teaching

Here are a few additional tips more specific to classroom instruction.

- Provide a written outline of the main topics you will be teaching in each class session. A preview of this information will help the student make connections more successfully when the actual teaching takes place.
- Present information visually when possible (e.g., visual aids, power points, outlines, gestures, body language, etc.).
- Use name tags for group interactions with unfamiliar people. It is much easier to associate a name to a face when it is readily available to the eye.
- in group meetings, establish turn-taking rules, whereby everyone raises their hand before speaking and waits until they are called upon before engaging.
- Set up the room in a circle if appropriate. That way the individual with a hearing loss can see everyone who is talking.