



Communicating with the Hearing-Impaired

Good communication depends a great deal on being able to hear well. Often enough, our loved ones do not themselves know that something is wrong with their hearing. They interpret facial expressions, read lips and other gestures to fill in the gaps of a conversation. This can be especially true if your loved one is suffering from a major chronic illness that makes it difficult for them to talk and let you know they are having trouble hearing.

Here are some tips to help you communicate, and cope, with an hearing-impaired person:

- ✓ **Anticipate problems and be prepared to take extra time.** If your loved one doesn't hear or understand well, you may have trouble even with routine activities. More time equals less stress.
- ✓ **Make sure your loved one can see you well.** Approach them from the front and face them directly. Sit close enough for them to see your face and mouth.
- ✓ **Get and keep you loved one's attention.** Wait to begin talking until the person is focused on you. Sometimes a gentle touch on the arm, if allowed, will help you make eye contact. Communication is 10% what you say and 90% the mannerisms in which you say it.
- ✓ **Find out how your loved one hears best.** If one ear hears better than the other then speak on that side.
- ✓ **Be alert to background noise.** You may not notice them but to your loved one, they drown you out. Background noises like television and radio makes it

very difficult to hear.

✓ **Use short, simple words and sentences to be understood more easily.**

✓ **Speak slowly, clearly and distinctly, without shouting.** A shrill or loud voice will make you sound upset or angry compelling your loved one to react defensively. Lowering your tone, not your volume, often helps. This may feel odd to you ladies, but reach deep inside to find your lower speaking voice and try it for yourself.

✓ **Use gestures to support what you say.**

✓ **Check with your loved one to see if they understand.** If they don't, then try to find a new, simpler way to say the same thing.

✓ **Be prepared to repeat yourself.** Though this can be more frustrating for some than others, you must be patient.

✓ **Take care of yourself.** Caregiving can be tiring, frustrating and irritating. Don't deny your fatigue or your feelings. You still need to find a way to let your feelings out. You especially need to build in time for yourself to take a break. You may need to find helpers who can give you occasional respite. Call us at 603-9110 for a referral list of licensed facilities providing Adult Day Care as well as those that provide in-home care.

This article appeared in our Spring 2010 newsletter.

