



218 Northbourne Avenue
BRADDON ACT 2612
Tel: 02 6262 7808
TTY: 02 6262 7809
Fax: 02 6262 7810
E-mail: info@deafnessforum.org.au
Website: www.deafnessforum.org.au

Some simple strategies when communicating orally with a person who is Deaf or has a hearing impairment

When communicating orally with a person who is Deaf or has a hearing impairment, there are various strategies that can assist. Firstly, ask the person about their communication needs – if necessary using written communication at this point. Most people will be happy to explain their needs and provide advice about how best to effect communication with them. It is important to ensure that there is sufficient indirect lighting to allow effective lipreading or the reading of an interpreter. This may mean the provision of supplementary lighting in some situations.

To facilitate effective lipreading, it is important to make sure your lips are always visible to the person who needs to lipread. If a person cannot see your lips then he or she cannot lipread. If you have a moustache, keep it trimmed clear of your lips! Always speak directly to the person with a hearing impairment. Do not cover your mouth with your hands while speaking. Do not address questions to an accompanying interpreter, family member or friend.

If possible, find a quiet area away from background noise. Noisy environments make communication more difficult. Unfortunately, there are many noisy indoor (as well as outdoor) environments; e.g. because of air-conditioning or the lack of double-glazing on windows near heavy traffic.

Do not shout at a person with a hearing impairment. This does not help them to hear you better. Shouting distorts your lip patterns and makes lipreading more difficult. Speak clearly but do not over enunciate your speech as this also distorts normal lip patterns.

If necessary, identify your topic at the beginning of what you say. This allows the person with a hearing impairment to anticipate words that may be used. Use open-ended questions that do not require a yes or no response. This helps to ensure that your questions are being understood. If you receive an inappropriate response to your question or an indication that the other person has not understood you, do not repeat the same words. Rephrase what you initially said, using different words.

Interviewing a person who is Deaf or has a hearing impairment is going to take more time than usual. Be prepared to set aside as much time as is needed in order to ensure that you have an accurate statement. In difficult situations (e.g. at the scene of a traffic accident) it is possible that due to stress, confusion or pain, that a

person's speech may be difficult to understand, or a person may have more difficulty lipreading. Consider seeking the services of an independent person who can assist, by contacting the local branch of an appropriate support group, such as Better Hearing Australia or a Deaf Society. If you do not have the services of such an independent person, write down all your questions.

If you need to speak with someone else in the room whilst communicating with a hearing impaired person, make sure the person with a hearing impairment can also still hear (or at least let them know your intentions before doing so).

When communicating with a person who is Deaf, do not rely on a family member or friend to provide an "interpreting service" in any situation where accuracy is critical (such as a medical, justice or education situation). They may misinterpret because of insufficient skills. Always use a qualified professional interpreter of the correct type, if possible one with good training or experience of interpreting in a relevant setting.