

Communicating with hearing aid users

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Advice on contributing
to successful communication



This is the fifth in a series of brochures from Widex on hearing and hearing-related matters.

WIDEX
high definition hearing

Communication

The ability to communicate is likely to be affected when a person has hearing difficulties. Communication is a basic need for all of us, so it is important to remember that good communication requires the efforts of at least two people. It is consequently very important that you play your part in ensuring optimum communication when you are together with hearing impaired people.

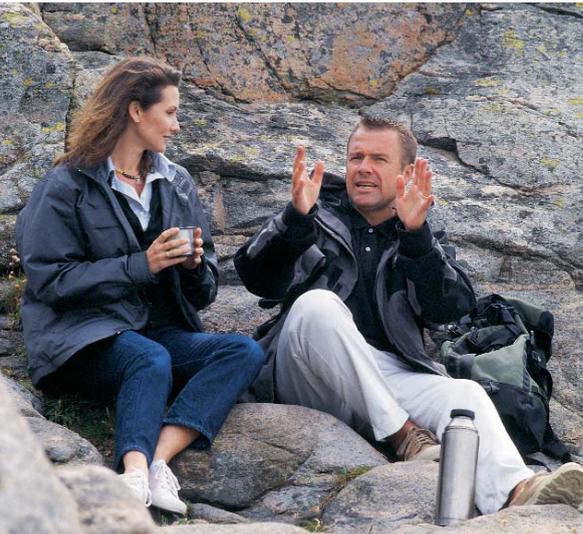
This brochure contains some helpful advice and tips for communicating with hearing aid users and people with hearing difficulties.



Becoming accustomed to hearing aids

It is a great advantage to have some knowledge about hearing aids when someone close to you is a hearing aid user. Many people commonly believe that hearing aids can completely restore people's hearing, but this is unfortunately an exaggeration.

Hearing aids are an invaluable help to hearing impaired people, but first-time users usually need time to adjust. The overall sound of the world around them is changed, their own voice sounds different, and sounds that have been "lost" for years may now be heard again. It takes time to become accustomed to hearing aids, but the support of family members, friends and colleagues can make a big difference.



Lip-reading, eye contact and physical contact

People with hearing loss come to rely to a greater extent on their other senses. Sight, touch and intuition are valuable communication tools. As hearing aid users make extensive use of lip-reading, either consciously or subconsciously, you should try to keep your whole face in clear view when speaking.

When you address a hearing aid user, try to make eye contact and perhaps say the person's name. If you know each other well you can touch, for example, the person's arm to catch his or her attention.

Distance

Another significant factor is distance. It is crucial that you are positioned close to the person you wish to speak with.

The level of your voice is halved when the distance is doubled – so even a small increase in distance may cause communication to fail.

It does not help to shout

Many people with normal hearing believe they have to shout to be understood by hearing impaired people. However, the hearing aid user's main problem is usually not the *volume* of your voice, but the *articulation* of your words. So it is far more helpful to simply speak clearly and more slowly – without exaggeration. In fact shouting is usually as uncomfortable for a hearing aid user as it would be to someone with good hearing.



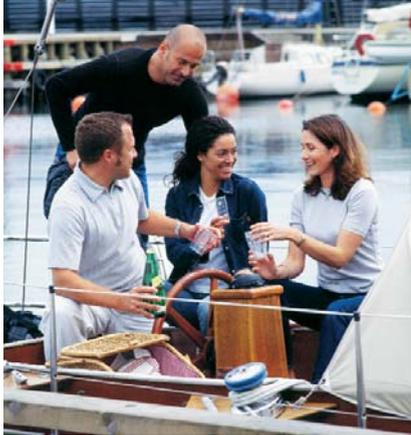
Some sounds are more difficult to hear than others



Hearing problems often manifest themselves as the inability to hear certain sounds, or the confusion of some sounds with others. People with a hearing loss may hear some of the words of a sentence, but fail to understand the spoken message. In such situations it can be a good idea to rephrase your sentences, as you might when communicating with someone from overseas who has not yet mastered English.

It is important to remember that any kind of background noise makes it much more difficult for a hearing aid user to communicate. As people do not generally want to appear to be a nuisance by asking favours, it helps considerably if you can remember to switch off any sources of noise, such as the radio or television, before communicating with a hearing impaired person. Noisy children or parties, where everyone is speaking at the same time, are other situations where people with a hearing loss may give up communicating and appear to isolate themselves from events going on around them.

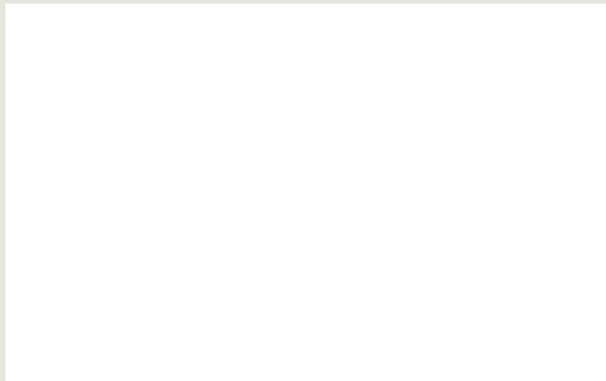
Psychological consequences of hearing loss



Some people can develop emotional or social difficulties due to their hearing loss. The inability to understand what is being said can lead to isolation, loneliness or depression. It can therefore mean a great deal if the people around them are supportive and encourage them to seek professional advice if necessary.

Some people with a hearing loss struggle with a feeling of embarrassment if they misunderstand what is being said, or respond inappropriately. Your support and understanding in such cases can make a big difference.

People with hearing difficulties often spend a great deal of their energy just in concentrating on listening, which can lead to tiredness and stress. So it is important that others are equally understanding, for example colleagues and management at their workplace.



Printed by FB / 07-02
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