

Caregiver's Corner Column (May 2015)

Hearing Loss in Both the Caregiver and Care Receiver

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Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

Hearing loss can be age related. It progresses gradually and is not always recognizable. If both the caregiver and receiver are experiencing hearing loss it can often escalate the difficulties related to this situation. Education and open communication are the keys to successfully address this situation.

Use the following **Self-Test for Hearing Loss** to determine if you or someone you care for has hearing loss.

Self-Test for Hearing Loss:

1. Do you increase the volume on the television?
2. Do you frequently have to ask others to repeat themselves?
3. Do you have difficulty understanding when in groups or in noisy situations?
4. Do you have to sit up front in meetings or gatherings in order to understand?
5. Do you have more difficulty understanding higher voices than lower ones?
6. Are you unable to understand when someone talks to you from another room?
7. Do you have trouble knowing where sounds come from?
8. Have others told you that you don't seem to hear them?
9. Do you avoid family gatherings or social situations because you can't understand what is being said?
10. Do you have ringing or other noises (tinnitus) in your ear?

Scoring:

Answered Yes to less than 3 questions – No significant hearing loss present.

Answered Yes to 3 – 5 questions – You may have a slight hearing problem*

Answered Yes to 5 – 7 questions – You have a moderate hearing problem*

Answered Yes to more than 7 questions – You have a significant hearing problem*

*In order to determine the exact degree of hearing loss, have your hearing evaluated by a licensed hearing professional.

If you, as a caregiver, along with the individual that you care for both experience hearing loss the following strategies may help to improve your communication:

1. Speak in a normal tone of voice. Don't shout; shouting distorts the sound of a voice. If the person lip-reads shouting will distort the face and mouth.
2. Speak clearly and slowly. Don't clip word endings or mumble. Don't over-articulate words. Stress key words and pauses between statements.
3. Use natural gestures and facial expressions. Avoid moving around while talking.
4. Speak at a distance of three to six feet.
5. Stand in clear light facing the person you are speaking to. This will make lip movements, facial expression, and gestures easier to see. Don't stand in-front of a bright light or sunny window; this puts the face in a shadow.
6. Have the attention of the person and be clearly visible before starting to speak. Tapping a shoulder or waving from a distance will get their attention.

7. Move away from background noise. People with hearing loss cannot separate specific voices or sounds from the noise.
8. If the person with hearing loss misunderstood rephrase the statement. Look for clues, such as facial expressions and inappropriate responses. Using different words with similar meanings can make it easier for them to hear and understand words.
9. Do not obscure the mouth, chew food or gum while speaking. If a person is lip-reading, anything hindering typical mouth movements will not allow them to follow correctly.
10. Include them in the conversation. Announce the topic of conversation; don't force them to guess. Speak directly to them, not about them. Announce topic changes. If the person asks for clarification **NEVER** say "never mind" or "it doesn't matter". This is rude and makes the person feel unimportant
11. In a group meeting, arrange the room so that everyone can see one another. Eliminate background noise as much as possible. Allow only one person to speak at a time.
12. **Ask** them what you can do to make conversation easier.

There is no one perfect way to communicate that will work in every situation and a method that worked one time may not work the next. Ensure that you are flexible and adaptable.

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