

information sheet

Communicating with Deaf and Hearing Impaired people

Communicating with people who have a severe hearing loss can be stressful for everyone involved. However it doesn't have to be so.

Here are some tips that should help.

- **Don't shout** when you are speaking to a deaf or hearing impaired person. Shouting distorts your mouth and makes lip reading difficult.
- **Make sure you have the person's attention** before you start speaking. You could do this with a *gentle* tap on the shoulder.
- **Make sure your lips can be seen.** Don't cover your mouth with your hands or an object while you are speaking. If you have a moustache, deaf and hearing impaired people will find it very difficult to read your lips. Keep your moustache well trimmed so it doesn't cover your lips.
- **Don't stand with a light or window at your back** - the light needs to be on your face.
- **Speak face to face** without standing closer than you'd normally stand to a hearing person. If you are talking with your back to a deaf or hearing impaired person or shouting from another room, you won't be understood. Don't try and hold a conversation from across the room.
- **Speak slowly** with gaps between each word and phrase. Many older people have difficulty following rapid speech, even when they can hear it without too much problem.
- **Pronounce each word clearly.** Make sure you do not miss the ends off words, or drop the tone at the ends of words and sentences, which makes it hard to follow.
- **Vary the height or depth of your voice** to find a tone that works. Some people have difficulty hearing high tones – e.g. women's and children's' voices. A lower tone of voice might be easier to understand.
- **Try a different way of saying the same thing.** Rather than repeating yourself, try another way of expressing what you want to say
- **Emphasise the key words in the sentence.**
- **Write it down.** If you're having trouble being understood verbally, use written words and gestures to explain what you mean
- **Find an interpreter** if the person you want to talk to uses sign language.
- **Learn to sign** - make a start by using the finger spelling alphabet

Above all, don't turn away. Don't give up. Hearing impaired and deaf people can communicate with you. It just takes a little more patience and effort.