

It Matters

Your guide on how best
to communicate with
deaf people



Simple tips that will make life easier for
deaf people and people with hearing loss

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Hi, I'm Lucy,

Right now, you are doing something amazing. The fact that you are reading this guide means you want to do something to make life easier for deaf people and people with hearing loss. People like me. Thank you!

Being deaf or having hearing loss can be an incredibly isolating experience. It can be lonely. It can make you feel cut off from other people because of all the communication barriers you have to face on a daily basis. I know because I have been there.

Just by being aware of how best to communicate with deaf people or people with hearing loss, you can genuinely make life so much easier for them and make them feel included and connected.

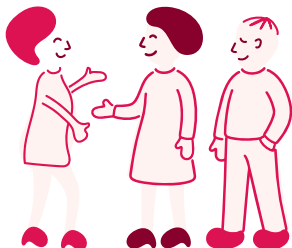
By taking five minutes to read this guide, you could be the one who completely turns around another person's day.

Thank you again for reading this guide, and for making a difference.

Warm wishes,
Lucy (and hearing dog Wilbur)



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It is estimated that one in three adults in the UK are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus. That's roughly 18 million people. An estimated 1.2 million people are severely or profoundly deaf.

They could be your friends, family members, colleagues, or neighbours. They could be the people who deliver your shopping, or the people working in shops, banks, or cafes.

Everyone has individual needs when it comes to communication. Not all tips in this guide will be appropriate for every person who is deaf or has hearing loss. But by being aware of the different ways that could aid communication, you could make someone's life much easier.



How can I tell if someone is deaf or has hearing loss?

Deafness is an invisible disability and every deaf person or person with hearing loss is an individual. Some may be happy to tell you, and some may not. Sometimes people have hearing loss but haven't yet reached the point where they have sought help or been diagnosed.

However, there are some signs to look out for that could indicate someone has some level of hearing loss:

- They may use a visible hearing aid or have a cochlear implant.
- They may have some kind of visual indication with them, such as a hearing dog, or a badge saying that they have hearing loss or that they lipread.
- They may ask you to repeat yourself when you say something, or ask 'Pardon?' or 'Sorry?' more than you might expect.
- They may find it difficult to tell which direction sound is coming from.
- They may misunderstand what you say or respond with something that doesn't seem to make sense, particularly when there is background noise.
- They may say you are mumbling or talking quietly.
- They may pay particular attention to your mouth and face when you are talking.
- They may move closer or lean towards the speaker to help them lipread.
- Their voice may be louder or quieter than normal.
- They may not seem to follow conversation, particularly in a group setting or in environments where there is background noise such as pubs, restaurants, and shops.
- They may turn up the volume on the TV or listen to music more loudly than is expected.
- They may have difficulty hearing on the phone.
- They cannot hear you without seeing your face.
- They may express frustration with a partner for not speaking clearly.

How best to communicate with deaf people or people with hearing loss

Here are some simple ways you can adapt the way you communicate to make life easier for someone who is deaf or has hearing loss.

Find out how the person prefers to be communicated with



It is okay to ask someone what their preferred communication method is.

Make sure you have their attention before talking



For example, a wave or light tap on the arm. It's far easier for someone to understand you if they know you are talking to them. It is also good practice to stand a metre or two away from the person. This is important for hearing aid users, lipreaders and people who use British Sign Language (BSL).

Always face the person you're talking to



Make eye contact and try to avoid covering your mouth, chewing, or turning away, as many deaf people and people with hearing loss rely on lipreading.

Speak at normal volume



Speak normally – don't exaggerate, shout or speak much slower than you normally would, as this can distort the way your mouth moves and your facial expressions, which makes it harder for people to lipread. Be patient, give time to process what you are saying. Don't try and have a conversation from another room or when the person's back is turned.

Don't say "It doesn't matter..."



If someone asks you to repeat yourself, avoid saying "don't worry, it doesn't matter", as this can make it seem unimportant and may leave them feeling frustrated and excluded. Instead, take the time to repeat or rephrase what you've said – no matter how many attempts it takes.

Try rephrasing



If you say something, and someone doesn't understand, try rephrasing it, or finding another way to say the same thing.

Stand somewhere with suitable lighting



Strong directional light, such as bright sunshine behind you, can make it difficult for others to see your face clearly which can hinder understanding.

Keep trying



One of the most important points to remember is to keep trying, even if the person with deafness or hearing loss does not understand what you are saying the first few times. Try different ways – rephrasing or writing down the message. It is important not to give up.

If possible, move to a quieter place with less background noise



Hearing when there is background noise can be particularly difficult for people with any level of hearing loss.

Use non-verbal communication



Some deaf people use British Sign Language (BSL) or Sign Supported English (SSE), so learning the basics could help.



If someone struggles to lipread what you are saying, try writing it down, or make use of technology



Speech-to-text apps are able to follow conversations and can also be recorded for recap later. This can be invaluable for taking in information at medical appointments. Personal listening devices, e.g. a Roger Pen can also be helpful for some people.

Take turns to talk



If you are with more than one person, make sure only one person talks at a time.

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When I'm talking to people, I sometimes have to ask them to repeat themselves. If they say "It doesn't matter", it can hurt my feelings. I know they aren't being deliberately dismissive, but it always makes me feel like what I'm saying isn't important. A lot of other deaf people have experienced this too, and it's really not a nice feeling. If someone is patient and repeats themselves, or rephrases what they've said, it can make the world of difference.

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Lucy

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide, and for taking an action to make life easier for people with hearing loss.

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People transform lives by rebuilding connection, companionship, and confidence. With your help, our expertly trained hearing dogs and peer-led support services mean everyone can live well with hearing loss.



To find out more and how else you could change the lives of deaf people visit hearingdogs.org.uk

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