

Everyday Communication

Tips for Supporting People with Deafness or Hearing Loss.

1 in 6

Australians have some level of hearing loss—and that number is growing.

That means most of us will, at some point, interact with someone who is deaf, Deaf, hard or hearing, or has hearing loss.

Good communication helps us all feel more connected. For people with hearing loss, it also supports mental health by reducing isolation, stress, and frustration.

This tip sheet offers simple, practical tips-based on real-life experiences-to make everyday conversations more inclusive and respectful for people with deafness or hearing loss.¹



Everyday situations—ordering coffee, chatting at work, visiting the doctor—can be challenging for people with hearing loss. Communication barriers may leave people feeling left out or misunderstood.

Small changes can make a big difference.



Making eye contact








Reducing background noise



Using clear speech

1. Our work spans public health and disability advocacy, so we use inclusive terms that reflect both clinical and cultural experiences. Deaf (capital D) refers to people who identify as culturally Deaf. deaf (lowercase d) refers to the audiological condition of hearing loss. Hard of Hearing (HoH) describes a range of hearing loss. Hearing loss is used broadly in public health. The use of “d/Deaf” is an accepted convention recognising the overlap between identities, without privileging one more. People may identify with one, all, or none of these. We respect each person’s choice.

COMMUNICATION TIPS — Use these as a flexible guide, not a checklist — each person is different		
Start With Respect 	Ask: “How can I best communicate with you?”	Everyone is different; asking shows respect and avoids assumptions
	Face the person & make eye contact	Helps with lip reading and builds trust and connection
	Speak clearly—not louder	Clear speech is easier to understand; shouting can distort your voice
Support Understanding 	Reduce background noise	A quieter space makes it easier to follow conversations
	Use gestures & natural facial expressions	Gestures add clarity; positive expressions help people feel at ease
	Rephrase if not understood	Try saying it differently, not just louder
	Check gently for understanding	Don't assume a nod means everything was heard
	Don't rush—pause and listen	Allow extra time to process what's being said
Be Mindful of Body Language 	Don't cover your mouth or look away	Seeing lips and expressions help
	Be patient, avoid frustration	It takes effort to hear and understand
	Speak directly to the person—not their interpreter or companion	Include them fully in the conversation
Understand Hidden Challenges 	Listening fatigue² is real	Concentrating to hear all day is exhausting
	Hearing aids help, but don't fix everything	Noise can still be overwhelming
	Hearing aids help people hear, just like glasses help people see.	Support hearing aids the way we normalise glasses. They are tools for inclusion but don't define the person.
Don't Assume—Ask 	Not everyone lip-reads or signs	Ask what works for them
	Not everyone uses hearing aids or cochlear implants³	Communication needs vary—follow their lead
Offer Communication Options 	Use visuals, gestures, or communication cards	They can clarify or express ideas quickly
	Write things down or use captions	Useful in noisy spaces with complex information
Learn & Include 	Learn a few Auslan (Australian Sign Language) signs	Even simple greetings show effort and respect
	If you are in position to do so, provide Auslan interpreters when requested	It's supports equal access

2. Tiredness from concentrating to hear and understand all day. Source: American Academy of Audiology, “Fatigue and Hearing Loss,” American Academy of Audiology, <https://www.audiology.org/consumers-and-patients/hearing-and-balance/fatigue/>.

3. An electronic device that improves hearing. Source: Mayo Clinic, “Cochlear Implants,” Mayo Clinic, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cochlear-implants/about/pac-20385021>.

TIPS QUICK GUIDE	
What Helps	What Hinders
Facing the person	Turning away while speaking
Reducing background noise	Loud, busy environments
Speaking clearly	Shouting or mumbling
Asking about communication needs	Making assumptions
Using gestures and visuals	Relying only on speech

Everyone communicates differently.

Respecting each person’s preferred way—whether signing, speaking, writing, or using aids—helps build a more inclusive and understanding community.

About this Resource

This guide was shaped by the voices of people with lived experience of d/Deafness and hearing loss. It is a starting point for inclusive communication-not a comprehensive or clinical guide.

We know that everyone’s needs, settings, and situations are different. These tips are general in nature, and we encourage you to adapt them based on your role and context.

For workplace or service changes, consult appropriate professionals or authorities.

Information is current as of publication, but things can change—especially in areas like accessibility and best practice. Use this as a guide, stay curious, and always keep learning.

Informed by Research

This guide draws from the insights derived from our research:

“Exploring Help-Seeking Experiences in the Health System Among People with Deafness or Hearing Loss and Mental Health Concerns”

Read the full report:
www.deafnessforum.org.au

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