

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS:

Turning stressful dialogue into successful communications





“The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard.”

-William Hazlitt

It can be difficult to communicate with a loved one who is experiencing hearing loss—even more so, bringing up the conversation of hearing loss can heighten emotions.

Hearing loss affects individuals and families in a wide variety of ways. Some have an especially hard time understanding conversations in noisy environments while others experience the loss particularly when trying to hear high frequencies or soft noises. Often, hearing loss occurs gradually, so your loved one might not even realise it's getting worse.

SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS:

Social Signs

- Frequently asking people to repeat themselves
- Difficulty following conversations involving more than two people
- Frequent complaints that other people are mumbling
- Avoiding restaurants, shopping centres, or crowded meetings because of the ambient noise
- Trouble hearing the voices of women and children
- Tendency to stay home alone or avoid situations when hearing may cause a problem

Emotional Signs

- Not understanding what people are saying when they are not directly facing you
- Feeling stressed from straining to hear and understand
- Feeling annoyed at other people for mumbling or speaking too softly
- Feeling nervous about meeting new people
- Withdrawal from social situations or crowded events

Physical Signs

- Ringing in your ears
- Family history of hearing loss
- Medication that can harm hearing (ototoxic drugs)
- Previous exposure to very loud sounds over a prolonged period of time

Hearing loss affects each individual differently. Read Maureen's incredible story on how a hearing aid helped her communicate to four generations of her family.

For over five years Maureen asked people to repeat themselves. She missed conversations. She turned up the volume on the TV. She disliked talking on the phone.

Then she began planning what she calls, “the trip of a lifetime.”

That's when she turned to National Hearing Care to help solve her hearing problem.

“The National Hearing Care team was kind, understanding, and so helpful,” she says. “I explained that I was making a trip to Ireland. And I was leaving soon!”

Maureen ordered her hearing aids immediately.

“I was so excited that I could hear so well. I realised just how much I had been missing in my life,” says Maureen. “I was so happy.”

“I tell everyone how happy I am with my hearing aids, and how helpful National Hearing Care was in going the extra mile in helping me get fitted quickly — and helping me hear again.”

Read more customer stories at www.nhc.com.au/stories

BETTER COMMUNICATION WITH HEARING LOSS:

What you should know

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK

Even before you are ready to have the hard conversation, don't hesitate to ask what can make communication easier in their everyday life. Should you go to a quieter place for dinner? Do they need to turn down the background music when you talk? Opening up this kind of dialogue regularly can take a great deal of the stress away for both of you as well as take away the taboo of the subject.

FIND THE RIGHT TIME

Hearing loss can make quite an impact on a person throughout the day. Your loved one might have a headache from straining to hear all day at the office, or might be aggravated that everyone around them is mumbling. Try not to leave the conversation until late in the day, when the stress of living with hearing loss has already taken its toll.

CREATE THE OPTIMAL ENVIRONMENT

Be sure to find a quiet, well-lit place without distractions or background noise.

This will enable the other person to have full access to all the listening skills he or she has developed. It will also minimise distractions and enable both of you to concentrate on your discussion.

THE LIPS CAN SAY IT ALL

Many individuals with hearing loss automatically begin to read the lips of the people with whom they are speaking. So, be sure to face your loved one directly and speak clearly and naturally. Don't chew gum or attempt to talk with food in your mouth, as it will distort the shape of your lips and make interpreting more difficult.





Today almost **3 million** Australians over the age of 55 have some degree of hearing loss. But the good news is that the journey to better hearing starts with a single step.

STICK TO THE FACTS

While hearing loss is an emotional subject, bringing up factual points can help avoid those emotional minefields. Bring up some of the specific symptoms you've noticed. Highlight some facts about how common hearing loss is, and how easy it could be to address. Be sure to position all this as an observation, rather than an accusation. After all, this conversation comes from love, not blame.

ENCOURAGE A HEARING EVALUATION

Once you've stated your case, don't rush to define a set diagnosis. This is where an evaluation from a professional comes into play. These evaluations are free, simple, and encouraged for anyone over 50 as part of their annual check-up.

PRESSURE WILL NOT HELP

If your loved one is displaying symptoms of hearing loss, there is a lot of additional emotional turmoil they may be experiencing. They might not be quite ready to take action, or need additional time to process. Encourage them to pay attention to their behaviour and see if they notice the same things you're seeing. Give them some time to be a bit more aware and try having the conversation again in a few months. Hearing loss can be an emotional journey, and it often takes many years until a person is ready to take action. Taking a respectful approach to the touchy nature of the topic and offering sincere support can help shorten the process, and get our loved ones closer.

5 REMINDERS TO MAKE COMMUNICATION EASIER WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS WITH HEARING LOSS

- Sit facing your loved one, with excellent lighting to ensure they can read your lips.
- Give the conversation the time it needs. Do not rush answers or try to answer for the other person speaking.
- Try to find a quiet environment with minimal interruptions and background noise.
- Before starting a sentence, make sure to look the other person in the eye and get their attention to allow for effortless communication.
- Remember to ask your loved one how they'd like you to communicate. By placing their communication wants first, you'll be more likely to have a successful dialogue.