

Communicating with a person who has impaired hearing

There are nine million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. 55% of people over 60 and 93.2% of people over 80 are deaf or hard of hearing.

Being able to see the speaker's face is very important to people with any hearing difficulty. When someone speaks, clues are gained not only from what is heard, but also from what is seen; both lip movement and facial expression. These clues complement each other.

Simple things we can do to make following speech much easier:

1. Attract the person's attention before you start talking to them so that they can catch the beginning of what is said and not just the ending.
2. Position. Where possible, position yourself with your face to the light so that your face can be seen clearly.
3. Face the person/group you are speaking to. As far as possible stand still when speaking and avoid unnecessary hand and head movements.
4. Hearing aids amplify background noise as well as speech. Keep competing sounds such as TV, radio, machinery, mobile phone etc to a minimum.

Speaking

5. Do not hide your lip movements behind your hands or other obstacle such as a lectern or hand held microphone.
6. Look up while speaking. Looking down at a book, paper or computer screen may hide your lips.
7. Speak clearly and naturally. Do not shout or speak very fast because these alter the lip pattern. N.B. Some words are more difficult to lip read than others eg 'March' ('m' and 'ch' are visible on the lips) is easier to lip read than 'August' ('gust' requires little lip movement).
8. Keep to the point and keep the subject of conversation as clear as possible.
9. If necessary repeat the sentence and/or rephrase what you want to say.
10. When speaking in public (eg in church, meeting etc) have printed handouts available wherever possible.

Be patient! Hearing loss generates considerable anxiety in social situations which may further diminish the listener's ability to follow speech.
(Esther Langrish 2012)

If someone is profoundly deaf in your church, do contact local lip-reading classes and to support those who rely on British Sign Language, contact the Revd Catherine Carlyon (01363 772163) the Chaplain among Deaf People in Exeter Diocese.

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