Deaf Awareness Guide

WSDCS

Everyday environments become deaf-friendly when there's a good communication foundation.

Find out how people like to communicate

Every deaf child or young person has their own preferred method of communication. Ask about their preferences and how they would like you to communicate with them.

Get their attention

To get a deaf child or young person's attention, you can wave, knock a table, or tap their shoulder lightly.

Speak clearly

Speak as you normally would. Speaking slowly or too loudly makes lip-reading much more difficult.
Group conversations can be difficult for a deaf child or young person to follow. Communicate one at a time, signal before talking or signing and repeat or rephrase if the deaf child or young person has missed what was being said.

Face the person

Make sure they can see your face clearly when you're talking. Don’t move around while you’re talking as this will make it difficult to hear your voice and lip-read. Covering your mouth with your hands, eating, chewing gum or smoking can make lip-reading very difficult. It will also muffle any sound you’re making.

Make sure your face is well-lit

Make sure your face is well-lit to make lip-reading easier. Avoid speaking with your back to the window.

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Reduce background noise

Hearing aids and implants make sounds more clear, but they don't restore typical hearing. This means the person wearing them has to concentrate very hard on your voice to hear it over everything else.
Background noises such as traffic or the radio can make it difficult for them to listen. Block out unnecessary noise by closing windows and doors and turning machines off.

Write things down

If you're struggling to communicate, try writing your message down or texting on your phone. You could also use the 'dictate' option on your phone to transcribe your speech.

Use gestures

Point to what you're talking about and don't be shy about using gestures to support your communication.
For example, if you want to ask someone if they'd like a drink, you can point to your mug or make a drinking motion.

Don't say "I'll tell you later"

Deaf children and young people have told us someone saying "I'll tell you later" is their absolute pet hate.
They want to be involved just like their peers!
Take the time to repeat what a deaf child or young person has missed as many times as they need. If they still do not understand what you say after repeating, try rephrasing the sentence.
Changing your communication to that person's needs will really help with understanding. If one method doesn't work, do not be scared to improvise.

Inclusion should be built in – not added on.

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