

## What a HoH Needs to Know (Words to Explain Hearing Loss)

Published March 11th, 2015

Gael Hannan

**Note: HoH = Hard of Hearing Person~ Person with Hearing Loss**

*“She did it again—she started talking to me from another room.”*

*“His baseball cap shades his eyes, and I always have to ask him to take it off.”*

People with hearing loss complain that *other* people don’t accommodate us, or make an effort to meet our needs.

But, is it possible that....maybe....some of the fault lies with *us*? Perhaps the people we care about (and even those we don’t) may not truly appreciate the full picture of our hearing loss? Are we perhaps unrealistic in expecting them to recognize and remember our communication challenges in the very moment they occur? And when they don’t, do we spit it out, expecting them to instantly and expertly adapt on demand?

The issue of hearing loss is big and complicated. It takes time and a great deal of repeated information for hearing people to absorb the full scope of our needs. Perhaps we can help by boiling it down into digestible chunks.

There are four main messages—words that a HoH should know how to say and that our circle of *hearing* family, friends, and assorted others need to grasp: the fact that we *have* hearing loss, what technology can and cannot do, an overview of communication tactics and, finally, the nitty-gritty details of what we all must do in any given moment (and which, of course, are subject to change without notice).

**Message #1: I have hearing loss.** This is the starting point. I need to tell you this, and you need to absorb it. Once that’s done, there are things we both need to do in order to communicate, because it takes two to tango.

**Message #2: I use technology** (hearing aids or a cochlear implant) that can help amplify sounds, block out unwanted noise, and tell me what direction sound is coming from. But even with this electronic support, I may not understand in quite the same way or in quite the same time frame as you (the hearing person).

**Message #3: This is what I need from you**—all the time—because my hearing loss is permanent, although I hear better on some days than on others.

- To see your face so that I can speechread you. This means your entire face: eyes, eyebrows, mouth (and, unfortunately, the tongue and teeth inside it) and jaw.
- Clear articulation.
- A minimum of background sounds, because noise interferes with speech comprehension.
- Acceptance that I may need you to repeat, or reword, what you say.
- Realizing that although I may *seem* to be following the conversation, I may, in fact, be

lost. (However, it's also my responsibility to *not* “bluff” in the first place and to admit that I'm having difficulty following).

- Total recall of my hearing loss needs.
- Courtesy and patience even if I get emotional or cranky.

(Those last two are a tall order, but a HoH can dream, can't she?)

Message #4: These are the **brass tacks—what I may ask you for** in any given moment to improve **communication**:

- Face me
- Speak louder
- Don't shout
- Take your hand away from your face
- Move your lips
- Say that again (and again...)
- Rephrase what you just said
- Remove your hat
- Take off your sunglasses
- Turn down the music/noise
- Don't talk with food in your mouth
- Move into the light
- Come closer
- Write that down
- Don't nod your head while talking

The above points are all commands. To make them easier to comply with (and make you seem like a nicer person), you can pretty up the requests with *please*, *thank you*, and *I'm sorry, but...* These nice words are optional but they help keep things civil and emotions from overheating. Saying sorry doesn't mean we're apologizing for our hearing loss; it's a figure of speech, a placeholder, an introduction into what we really want to say. If you can eliminate it, do so. Saying please doesn't mean that we are groveling or begging for communication crumbs from the table. It's just polite—part of the happy dance of people who talk together. Follow up with a quick gesture of thanks—a word, nod or smile—helps reinforce our needs, and may help them remember what to do the *next* time. *Hey, I'm supposed to face her, because that helps her understand, our chat goes more smoothly and, hey, aren't I a grand person?*

These are the words a HoH should know how to say, in our own style of talking. And, as people with hearing loss, it might be time to drop the self-damaging notion that other people are deliberately trying to provoke us by ignoring our needs or not responding fast enough. It's very easy to forget the “rules” during the normal ebb and flow of a conversation, but guess what? People with hearing loss do it too. Yes, we do. Because we're not perfect people or perfect communicators either. But, if we're clear about what we need, and perhaps cut the other guy a little slack, we will be better *communicators*.

The above is adapted with permission from HearingHealthMatters.org