

The Four Levels of Hearing Loss – Where Do You Fit?

Hearing loss is a common health problem that continues to affect millions of people all over the U.S. What makes it prevalent is the fact that many people are unaware of the condition. Those who are aware of it still do not consider it a serious illness. The main reason for this ignorance is attributed to the fact that hearing loss is a gradual process which worsens with age, and people often realize they have a hearing problem when it is too late. Moreover, the majority of people find out through family members or friends.

It is difficult for the sufferer to identify the problem. In most cases, you see people raise the volume of the radio, TV, or ask others to repeat something during a conversation. However, having difficulties with your hearing ability is a serious health problem. Therefore, it is important to know the severity of the loss so that you can seek appropriate treatment.

Treatment of hearing loss depends on the type of hearing loss and causes. There are many solutions available that can be used to treat hearing loss. However, the treatment depends on your hearing test which determines the level of your hearing loss. The following are some of the most common levels of hearing loss as classified by audiologists.

1. Mild Hearing Loss

The quietest sounds people with mild hearing loss can hear are between 25 and 40 dB. This means they cannot hear sounds soft such as a ticking clock or dripping faucet. Although they can follow a one-on-one conversation, it can be difficult to catch every word in noisy environments. Fortunately, mild hearing loss can be rectified by using a hearing aid, which amplifies the low sounds and makes it easy to hear.

2. Moderate Hearing Loss

On average, someone with moderate hearing loss cannot hear sounds that are less than 40-75 dB. People with moderate hearing loss may have difficulty understanding normal speech. One may be unable to hear the ringing of a doorbell or a telephone. Also, it can be difficult to follow or hear sounds during normal conversations. Depending on an individual's hearing health, a moderate hearing loss can also be improved by using a hearing aid or middle ear implants.

3. Severe Hearing Loss

A person with severe hearing loss can have difficulty following a conversation without wearing a hearing aid. It is almost impossible to understand normal speech when one is not wearing a hearing aid. Although a hearing aid can be helpful, in most cases they are not that efficient in improving the ability of hearing. One of the treatments that can effectively rectify severe hearing loss is middle ear implants if appropriate or cochlear implants.

4. Profound Hearing Loss

This is the most significant and severe level of hearing loss. People suffering from this degree of hearing loss cannot hear sounds softer than 90-120 dB. For those suffering from profound hearing loss, using a hearing aid is most often ineffective. Profound hearing loss makes it difficult to even hear loud sounds, such as airplane engines or fire alarms. People with this degree of hearing loss cannot hear at all and usually rely on lip-reading, gesture or other visual cues. Some people will decide to use sign language. One of the best solutions to profound hearing loss is a cochlear implant, which can help an individual hear and understand speech after surgery and with rehabilitation.

<https://www.listen-2-life.com/blog/the-four-levels-of-hearing-loss-where-do-you-fit/>

The Deaf community is just that, a community. Deaf people have, of course, their own language in American Sign Language (ASL). They have their own cultural norms and customs. They also have their own unique set of challenges and obstacles.

We think the first thing to do is gather knowledge. The more you know about the Deaf community, the better you can invite, welcome, and engage them.

SOME USEFUL VOCABULARY

Deaf (with a capital “D”) - Identifies as culturally Deaf. People who have a hearing loss, communicate using a sign language, and are involved in the Deaf community.

Deaf (lowercase “d”) - Medical term for hearing loss

Hard of hearing (“hoh”) - Varies depending on culture. In general, a person with hearing loss that is not severe.

Hearing - anyone who is not deaf or hard-of-hearing; people who have the ability to hear well.

Deaf culture - a culture connected by multiple traits such as sign language, deafness, traditions, and shared values.

Communicating with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

How Should I Communicate?

Don't assume anything. Not all deaf and hard of hearing people prefer to communicate in the same way. Some might prefer to speak, some might prefer to sign, and some might prefer to write. Ask them how they want to proceed. They probably know exactly what they want from you.

If you speak out loud and they don't understand, try writing on a piece of paper or typing on your phone. If you write or type with a deaf person, do not look down on their English skills. Remember that many deaf and hard of hearing people are deprived of language as children and that English is a second language for many Deaf people.

If you know American Sign Language and you're talking to a deaf or hard of hearing person who uses sign language, you should try to sign yourself. Even if you feel nervous or unskilled, the person you're talking to will appreciate your effort, and they'll let you know if they prefer to communicate a different way.

Get Their Attention

Deaf and hard of hearing people process information visually, and it is much easier to communicate if you wait until they look at you before you begin. Get their attention. That way they can see your mouth, facial expressions, and body language.

If you need to get the attention of somebody who can't hear you, try the following:

Wave your hand in their line of sight. This is how Deaf people get the attention of one another.

Tap them lightly on the shoulder.

If they have their back turned away from you, get the attention of somebody in their line of sight, and have that person point at you.

If you know the Deaf person well, you can take advantage of the power of vibration. Tap a table or stomp on the floor. Use this method only if necessary.

If you need to get the attention of many deaf and hard of hearing people at once, turn the lights in the room off and on a couple times.

Body Language and Gestures

Deaf and hard of hearing people are visual. Those who are a part of the Deaf Community, especially, are experts at reading body language. Gesturing and using clear facial expressions when speaking to a person with hearing differences will help them understand what you're saying.

Miming is also okay if it helps to get a certain point across, but remember that mime is not the same as sign language.

Using Spoken Language

Establish the topic

People who are deaf or hard of hearing sometimes miss individual words or phrases during speech and rely on their knowledge of what's being discussed to fill in the gaps. However, conversations often change subject without warning, especially in groups.

If the topic of conversation changes, pausing to acknowledge the change and state the new subject can be a big help. Something as simple as, "Speaking of the weather..." is often enough.

Lipreading

Lipreading does not allow for 100% understanding. Many deaf and hard of hearing people are reluctant to say that they can lipread because of this myth.

According to the National Association for the Deaf, "On average, even the most skilled lipreaders understand only 25% of what is said to them, and many individuals understand far less. Lipreading is most often used as a supplement to the use of residual hearing, amplification, or other assistive listening technology. Because lipreading requires some guesswork, very few deaf or hard of hearing people rely on lipreading alone for exchanges of important information."

If you know that lipreading is happening, make sure that the other person can see your face, and follow these tips:

Don't forget the importance of body language.

Keep your mouth and eyes visible. Don't cover your mouth with your hands. Don't eat or chew gum while you talk.

Maintain eye contact; try not to look around the room too much.

Face forward while speaking; don't turn your back.

If you have a thick mustache or beard, keep in mind that you will be much harder to lipread.

Lighting is an important factor in making sure the other person can see your face. If possible, try to communicate in bright spaces. Do not sit or stand directly in front of a bright window or light source, because it will create a shadow over your face that makes lipreading extremely difficult.

Speak clearly and enunciate

Speaking clearly and enunciating can help a deaf or hard of hearing person understand you. However, it does not mean shouting and speaking extremely slowly. Why?

Understanding speech is not always a volume problem. Many people with hearing differences can't understand speech well even if the volume of the voice they're listening to is satisfactory. This is because of damage in the inner ear that causes distortion, which loudness can't fix.

Changing the way you speak makes you harder to understand. People with hearing differences use common speech rhythms to help them anticipate what other people are saying.

Group Conversations and Meetings

Spoken conversations with more than three or four participants are difficult situations for deaf and hard of hearing people. The back and forth nature of a group conversation can be hard to follow and mentally exhausting.

If you are planning a formal meeting, be proactive in planning for accessibility. Provide sign language interpreting or real-time captioning if that is what the deaf and hard of hearing person needs.

If your conversation is outside of the workplace and informal, be proactive in asking the participating deaf or hard of hearing people how you can make the situation accessible for them. You may want to do this in private so they feel comfortable being honest. Three easy tips to make any group conversation more accessible:

Establish the topic, as explained above.

Speak one at a time.

Raise your hand before you speak, and wait for any deaf or hard of hearing people to look at you before beginning.

Awkward moments

Even if you follow all of the above tips while speaking to a deaf or hard of hearing person, they might still misunderstand you at some point. Don't stop. Just repeat yourself and continue the conversation. If they're having trouble understanding a certain word or phrase, try using a different word, rephrasing what you said, or typing it in your phone.

Resist the urge to give up when misunderstandings happen. A little effort on your part can make a big difference to somebody else, and you'll benefit from the experience, too.