

# She heard me! Didn't she?

Not everyone hears as well as you do, but inside they are no different.

Take the deafness challenge. Buy several pairs of cheap earplugs. Involve your work colleagues/family/friends; choose an appropriate day and time, half an hour should be long enough. Choose an appropriate venue: work, shopping centre, outside restaurant, inside restaurant, busy traffic area, travelling home or at home with the TV on while dinner is being cooked. Now place the ear plugs in tightly, ask some important questions, being mindful of the do's and don'ts below.

Now, how much did you hear? Did you hear the train announcements? How did it feel when you crossed the road and couldn't hear the traffic? How many times did you have to ask someone to repeat what he or she said? Did you get startled when someone came up behind you? Did you miss out on the invitation to lunch or an important meeting at work? Were you able to take your phone calls? How tired did you get? How thoughtful were people that didn't know you were undertaking this challenge?

This is the world for the deaf and hearing impaired. They can't take their earplugs out and have to struggle to communicate every day. We take our senses for granted but when we lose one, life changes forever.

Here are some guidelines when communicating with people who have a hearing loss.

- ❖ Be patient and understanding. Remember we are deaf not dumb.
- ❖ Walk on the hearing side, not the deaf side, if a person can only hear from one side.
- ❖ When dining out, ask the person where they would like you to sit so they can hear you.
- ❖ Attract their attention in some way so you don't startle them, be discrete.
- ❖ Make sure you walk into their line of vision so they will know to look at you.
- ❖ Position yourself in front of them so they can watch while you speak and get extra help from reading your lips.
- ❖ Speak normally, clearly and don't mumble. Sometimes you may need to speak a little slower, but definitely do not over emphasise words because this makes lip reading harder and can be very embarrassing.
- ❖ Don't cover your mouth or look away while you speak.
- ❖ Don't call out from another room or walk away while you are talking. The deaf often cannot discriminate sound direction.
- ❖ Don't speak while there is competing noise (eg others are talking, or television or music is on).
- ❖ Write post-it-notes or memos to confirm specific instructions – email is an excellent medium for this.
- ❖ Don't get frustrated or angry if you have to repeat what you said (especially if you are a shop assistant).
- ❖ Deaf people often look at your facial expressions and act accordingly. eg someone laughs, we smile, someone cries, we empathise, even though we may not know what the conversation is about.
- ❖ We all use visual cues with our family and friends, thumbs up or down, blow kisses across a room, place your hand on your heart when you are proud. Try a few simple signals to your hearing impaired friend or family member. It can be fun and makes the hearing-impaired person feel good inside knowing that you are making an effort to involve them. We do it with our kids when they win a race or score a try, look beautiful or you want them to hush. Make it a personal thing, just between you and your friend, it will bring joy and a smile.

Above all, please remember that we don't enjoy being treated poorly; we deserve respect, just like you do. Thanks so much for reading this. I know it will make someone very happy to know that you are doing something wonderful for someone special.