

Hearing Tactics Telephone Tactics

The following tactics and strategies can be used to make telephone conversation easier, more efficient and more enjoyable.

Assertive Behaviour on the Telephone

It is important to acknowledge your hearing loss and explain the specific communication changes you require. You can further ensure success by phrasing your request in an assertive manner. An assertive request states your needs but also preserves the rights and needs of the other person.

An assertive request would sound like this:

"I have a hearing loss, and there is a lot of background noise in this room. Would you mind speaking a little more slowly please?"

Aggressive requests, by contrast, put your communication partner on the defensive.

An aggressive request may sound like this:

"Speak up; I can't possibly hear you in all this background noise".

Passive requests are self-defeating. They imply your needs are secondary to others'.

A passive request may sound like this:

"I'm really sorry but I have a hearing problem, and I know it's a nuisance but I'm not very good in background noise. It's presumptuous of me to ask but would you mind speaking a little more slowly".

To ask assertively, and to give a reason for your request, places the person you are speaking to in a position of respect and equality. This will ensure that they are most likely to treat you in the same way and respond appropriately to your request.

Using the Telephone to its (and your) Best Advantage

Here is a list of questions you may want to consider when doing this:

- Which ear do you prefer for listening on the phone?
- Exactly where do you hold the handset of the phone?
- Does noise bother you when you are on the phone?
- Do you use your hearing aid on the phone?
- Do you need more volume on the phone?
- Do you use or need any supplementary devices with your phone?

Give yourself the time to effectively use the phone, your hearing aid and any assistive devices you might need. This may require you to answer the phone and ask the person to hold while you get set up. To ask assertively and explain briefly why you are doing this will ensure cooperation.

If the telephone line is bad or the background noise is loud, agree to ring back at a more suitable time. Again, it is important to explain exactly why this is necessary so that you are more likely to have cooperation from your conversation partner.

Anticipating Problematic Telephone Calls

Before making your phone call it is helpful to anticipate any potential problems that may arise. For example, the speaker may have a soft voice or speak very fast, the message may be complicated or technical or the environment may be noisy.

There will always be times, however, when you cannot anticipate that a specific problem will arise. During these times it is important to be able to accurately spot the source of the problem and respond to it from the range of tactics you have developed.

Conversational Strategies

The way you word your questions will influence the way the person you are speaking to will word his or her response.

A. Word the questions you ask so that you can anticipate the range of possible answers.

Questions that require a "Yes" or "No" response are much more predictable than "Open Ended" questions. For example:

"Do you travel by plane?" (Yes/No)

"How did you travel?" (Open-ended)

The first question narrows the possible answers down to only two (ie. "Yes" or "No").

B. Once you know the topic of a conversation you can predict the sort of vocabulary that is likely to be used. Establish the topic early in the conversation by asking for one or two key words. This will lessen your reliance on guessing. Establish the topic early in the conversation by asking for one or two key words. This will lessen your reliance on guessing.

C. Communication instructions or requests need to be quite specific. Ask your conversation partner to:

- repeat what he/she said
- repeat with emphasis on key words rephrase what he/she said
- repeat key word(s) only
- give you more information
- spell key words

Should you find that you have only heard part of what was said, it is better if you tell the other person, so that they know what parts you have missed, rather than just saying “What?” or “Pardon” or “I missed that”. Speakers may need a gentle reminder if they cannot maintain the new communication technique during conversation.

D. Inform friends and family of the tactics available when conversing by phone.

Taking Messages

One of the most common difficulties experienced when using the phone is making note of names, numbers, addresses etc.

Some numbers sound very similar (e.g. five and nine) and some letters sound alike (e.g. b, g, d, e, p, t and v).

Long digits (e.g. amounts of money, street numbers), can be expressed as a series of single numbers. For example, One thousand, nine hundred and eighty four can be expressed as one, nine, eight, four.

If you are not sure if the person said nine or five as the second digit, you can ask them to count up to that number. Thus you would hear “one two three four five six seven eight nine”. The number of syllables (or words) indicates that “nine” (not five) is the number you require.

When having difficulties with names or addresses, spelling words using a code can be helpful. Thus “Andrew” is spelt as “A for apple, N for Nellie, D for dog, R for rope, E for egg. When using any telephone tactic, it helps to ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I treat my conversational partner as an equal when using this strategy?
- Did I explain the reason why I asked my conversational partner to change his/her communication style?
- Did I explain rather than excuse my hearing loss and the problems that arise from it?
- Was the result of using this strategy/tactic successful, rewarding and/or adaptive?

Other Hints and Techniques

Consider a telephone with a volume control. Your carrier may have telephones with features suitable for those with hearing difficulties.

Discuss your telephone difficulties with your Audiologist. Many hearing aids have a ‘telecoil’ feature (T-switch) which can be helpful during use with compatible telephones.

There is a wide range of accessories to help hearing aid users hear better on the mobile phone. However, it depends on the model of your hearing aid and whether or not your mobile phone has Bluetooth capabilities. Check with your audiologist if you would benefit from this technology.

Consider the option of an assistive listening device for the telephone.

Related Information Sheets

- Devices for People with a Hearing Impairment.

For more information speak to an expert at:



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