

Coping With Hearing Loss

By
Judith S. Parnes,
L.C.S.W., C.M.C.
Executive
Director



If your elderly relative suffers from hearing loss, you are painfully aware that the loss entails more than just hearing. Lost, too, is the easy connection with family and friends that is based on the clear reception of verbal messages and vocal nuances.

Experts estimate that fully 75 percent of people who reach the age of 80 are affected by hearing loss. Some cases are correctable through surgery or even the removal of built up earwax, but others are irreparable. In many cases, a properly selected hearing aid helps, but is not a panacea. As the hearing aid

increases loudness, clarity diminishes, often presenting a problem distinguishing words.

An elderly person who misunderstands or misses verbal messages can feel confused and embarrassed. Asking to have things repeated interrupts typical conversational flow, and many find it easier to nod and smile even though the message is not understood.

The challenge of communication can be so frustrating, that both you and your elderly relative may simply do it less frequently and less fully. Below are some techniques that may help:

1. Look at your conversational partner. Make sure your mouth and face are visible.

2. Speak clearly, enunciating each syllable carefully.
3. Use your hands and body to act out your message.
4. Talk slowly, but do not “talk down.”
5. Touch, and then, speak directly.
6. Eliminate obtrusive background noise, such as TV or radio.
7. Speak in as deep a pitch as you comfortably can.
8. Do not rush. Be patient. Listen.
9. When verbal communication is no longer possible, use a dry marker and erasable board to write messages back and forth. Write in large, legible print.

Hearing loss can be profoundly isolating for the elderly. Making communication a priority can help everyone stay connected.

Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C., Gerontologist and Elder Care Consultant is Executive Director of Elder Life Management, Inc., Ocean, NJ. ELM provides quality elder care planning and management services to older adults and their families. Please visit www.elderlifemanagement.org .or call (732) 493-8080 for more information.