

Meetings – helpful hints on making them deaf aware

It is said that even the most skilled lip-readers can only discern 30% of what is being said so taking the following steps can greatly help.

1. If there is an agenda please issue it before the meeting to make the meeting easier to follow.
2. Make sure emergency evacuation procedures are clearly explained and understood.
3. Try to choose a location with minimal background noise. No pen clicking or making other distracting noises either please as this makes concentrating on lip-read or trying to hear a voice extremely difficult). Also the clicking can be a painful sound to those with hearing issues or wearing a hearing aid.
4. If possible, allow a person with a hearing issue to choose where they sit / stand for optimal communication, preferably allow them to do this 5 minutes or so before the meeting is due to start so they can also 'adjust' to the acoustics.
5. If there is a hearing loop, ensure it is switched on and working.
6. Ensure there is good lighting. If you stand in front of bright light or a window, your face is in shadow making it difficult for someone to lip read or pick up on facial expressions. If possible have any room blinds either fully open or fully closed therefore avoiding 'stripes' across peoples faces or any screen.
7. If you are reading from a document, try not to hold it so that you look down to read it. When you look down, it is difficult for anyone to see how your lips are moving and pick up on any other visual clues. It is much better to hold any document in front of you.
8. Only one person should speak at a time, preferably putting their hand up first so it is clear who will be speaking next. Many people with hearing loss cannot locate sound and must rely on visual clues. Plus, they can only lip read one person at a time. This also means that group discussions can be extremely difficult to follow and participate in.
9. If someone asks you as speaker a question, please repeat the question before answering it. This not only allows clear understanding of the question but also people with hearing difficulties may not know what the question was unless the person asking it had their attention first and was facing them.
10. Always face your audience. If you turn away, you cannot be heard clearly or be lip read from. Try not to move about. It can be difficult and tiring to lip read anyway but lip reading a moving person is even more difficult and tiring.
11. If you use videos as part of a presentation, please include captions or subtitles.

12. Always follow up in writing with the key points of the discussion and any agreed outcomes. If any document was read out, provide a copy of that too. Provide as much written information as you can. Remember that it is difficult for many people with hearing issues to take notes as they cannot lip read and look down to write at the same time.
13. Remember that a person with hearing loss may not be able to hear the tone of what's being said and so may not pick up jokes or any sarcasm.
14. Remember that it is not possible to look at handouts, videos and PowerPoints and lip read the person presenting them at the same time.
15. Finally, please be aware that a person with hearing issues may be very tired after training sessions, meetings or presentations. They will have had to visually concentrate to locate a voice, to lip read and pick up any visual clues and gestures to even know what was said before they can even begin to process the information that was imparted.