Communication Strategies for the Hearing Impaired

Communication is a vital part of our existence. When one has a hearing loss, the quality of communication can be impaired. Understanding speech becomes a task which may result in frustration, exhaustion, depression and eventually lead to isolation.

To overcome these barriers, an individual with a hearing impairment must use communication strategies. However, for communication strategies to be successful, one must be assertive. The first step is being willing to admit to a hearing problem and explain what communication difficulties are experienced as a result. The second step is to suggest ways in which friends and family could assist to improve communication, such as:

- **Always face the person with a hearing loss when speaking.** This provides visual cues which assist in speech discrimination.

- **Speak clearly and with a normal volume.** Don't exaggerate or over-articulate speech.

- **Speak slowly using an even rate of speech.** This allows time to mentally fill in any gaps or clarify confusions.

- **Eliminate background noise whenever possible.** Turn off the T.V., etc.

- **Don't attempt to communicate from a distance.** Remember, face-to-face conversation is best.

Communication can be more effective if strategies are employed to seek missed information or for further clarification. The following is a list of helpful communication strategies.

- **Be an active participant.** Anticipate possible vocabulary, dialogue and questions you may be asked.

- **Try never to ask for repetitions unless absolutely necessary.** Instead:
  - Repeat exactly what you understood. The speaker will undoubtedly clarify any errors.
  - Repeat what was understood, leaving blanks where words were missed. The speaker should readily fill in the blanks. For example: "I heard you say that your son was (going on vacation) to Jacksonville, Florida next month."
  - Clarify by repeating key words which were understood. For example: "You said something about a spruce in your backyard?" "Yes, I was talking about planting Colorado Blue Spruce trees along the fence in my backyard."
  - Ask a Question. For example: "At what restaurant are we meeting?"