

Strategies to Support Students with Hearing Loss

1) A person with hearing loss requires more than just an increase in volume, whether it is from a hearing aid, FM listening device or some other assistive technology. The ideal scenario is one in which the person with hearing loss has full access to a speaker's facial expression, gestures, body language, etc. This isn't an easy scenario to develop in a classroom situation but striving for this setting will make a huge difference.

2) In the course of an 80-minute block, the discussion that takes place between students and teacher(s) is a very challenging experience for a person with hearing loss. **It's very important to repeat and/or paraphrase what is spoken by students during these activities.**

For example, if you begin the class by asking your students what they did over the summer vacation and Sally, a student in the back of the room replies, "*I went to Disney World with my family and I loved the roller coasters and fireworks shows.*" You as the teacher could respond, "*It sounds like you had a fun time in Disney with your family Sally.*"

Another example is perhaps a discussion about homework taking place the last 10-minutes of class and students are asking clarifying questions such as; "*Do we need to use two or three resources to answer the DBQ question?*" If you answer with a single word such as, "*two,*" the student with hearing loss does not have a reference point in order to comprehend the meaning of your reply. The desirable answer could be, "*You will need to use two primary resources to answer the question.*"

3) Roundtable discussions, particularly those that are not led by the teacher but maybe perhaps a student or panel of students will be difficult without a plan in place. In this case, if possible, to avoid embarrassment and anxiety for the person with hearing loss, provide him or her with advance notice that such an activity will take place. Without "outing" the disability to other students, including CM peer mentors, alert the roundtable leaders that there are students with hearing loss and to **try to use their best "teacher voice" and repeat back as much as possible to ensure everyone can be an active and successful participant.**

4) Never assume the student with hearing loss has complete understanding of directions and what's happening in class., especially if the student is still in denial or reluctant to advocate for themselves in the school environment. The preferable way to handle this is not to ask a "yes or no" reply question when seeking clarification for understanding because many people with hearing loss will "fake it" to avoid embarrassment. **It's advantageous for the instructor to ask the student in private, "Can you explain to me what the directions are for the assignment?"** "*Today's demonstration included the events that led to the Industrial Revolution. Can you tell me about the events in your own words?*"

5) If the student's IEP indicates that the student has a "better hearing ear," position the desk of the student with the "hearing ear" in the direction that is advantageous to hearing in the classroom. Something important to keep in mind; our heating/HVAC system creates loud noise

at times. If possible, try to strategically place the student with hearing loss away from the source of the noise.

6) Class activities in groups or pairs can be daunting for people with hearing loss. The background noise is a major distraction and barrier to fully being able to achieve desirable communication with assigned partners. If possible, consider in advance **having the group or pair with the person with hearing loss move to a neighboring classroom that is empty**. Perhaps the hallway may even be a more suitable location if the classroom door is closed. If these options are not accessible or realistic, try to place the pair/group in an area of the room that borders the perimeter to decrease noise coming from all directions.

7) Ideally, videos should include captions. **If you use You YouTube video or another online instructional lesson, check to see if there's an option to add captioning.**

8) **Providing visuals of as much text and images as possible is ideal. Posting instructions, showing examples and providing organizers with step-by-step directions will support the student with hearing loss if he or she is missing fragments and pieces of the spoken part of the daily lesson.**

9) If possible, please gauge the speed at which you talk. The person with hearing loss is always a few seconds behind in processing what they hear because they are, unconsciously, gathering a combination of what they hear and see to extrapolate what is being said. This is why some people with hearing loss respond a few seconds after they've been asked a question.

10) Please be mindful to keep your classroom door closed. Noise from the hallway can detract from hearing what's being spoken in class.

11) Many instances in class we tend to bend down and whisper to a student. If you do this, it's important that the student with hearing loss is looking directly at you. It would be ideal for you to write a note of what you want to whisper and provide the note to the student to ensure he or she understands your query, comment, etc.

12) Ask the student periodically how the seat location is working for him or her. Please don't assume that the location you chose for the student is what's working best for them.

13) In conjunction with the IEP Team, periodically remind the student with hearing loss that he or she needs to advocate for what works best in regards to an "ideal" learning environment. We can suggest additional strategies such as periodic, on an as-needed basis **10-minute one-to-one clarification conferences after school** with teachers or perhaps the student would fare better with emails of **copies of outlines and discussions from daily lessons.**

14) If the student with hearing loss has a microphone that is passed around the class when students are discussing a lesson's subject-matter, the other students may not be respectful and

either shouts into the microphone as a “joke” and/or is hesitant to talk into the microphone. (*I have had this experience.*) Let me know and I would be more than happy to meet in private with those students and have a meaningful conversation about being sensitive and respectful of the microphone.

15) If the person with hearing loss has a friend in the class, it may be a good idea to pair them up and have them close to each other so perhaps the friend will support clarification when confused.

Things to consider...

-Please alert other staff who may take on a teaching role with you from time to time such as a library or computer lab instructor to the needs of the student with hearing loss. Perhaps you could provide them with a copy of this list?

- A person with hearing loss, especially one who does not use a hearing aid, may talk loud to hear themselves and not realize the difference in volume compared to “normal” speech in various settings. Alert the liaison about this if it creates an embarrassing or awkward situation for the student in the classroom environment.

-There are consonants and other parts of speech that may not be heard correctly by a person with hearing loss thus creating a potentially frustrating and embarrassing scenario. For example, if I stated, “*The pitcher’s mound appeared larger than what I thought it would be.*” The person with hearing loss may reply, “*What was round about the pitcher?*”

- People with hearing loss tend to “isolate” themselves due to the arduous “work” involved when trying to hear in various environments. It is “easier”, certainly not preferable, for the person with hearing loss to separate themselves from others especially after a long day at school. This may result in being perceived as being “unsociable” or “unfriendly.”

-Don’t assume the student with hearing loss is willing to discuss their disability with you due to denial, embarrassment, and stigma. There are phases of acceptance and it’s a journey for many.

-A person with hearing loss, especially those who choose not to use supportive assistive listening equipment such as hearing aids will be exhausted on a frequent basis and may even suffer from headaches. This is usually a result of straining to hear throughout the school day.

Hearing Aids-

- In my experience, people of all ages with hearing loss prefer their “quiet world” for various reasons; one being that the hearing aid makes EVERYTHING loud which can be challenging, especially in a school environment. **The tolerance level for noise varies.**

-If the student doesn't carry a set of batteries in their book bag and the battery in the aid loses power, it can be discouraging. Ask him or her if it would be okay to leave a couple of batteries in your drawer for safekeeping.

-Sweat and moisture are MAJOR issues for those who wear hearing aids. The moisture/sweat will cause the hearing aid to stop working.

PE instructor-> obviously, a student with hearing aids will not be able to wear them when swimming. I would highly recommend meeting with the student in private to provide safety directives and instructions before entering the pool area. Also, the student may not want to wear his or her aids when participating in gym class due to the aforementioned issue of moisture. Again, it would be helpful to provide the student with advance notice about activities that require listening skills to participate when in the gym.

-Announcements made over the loudspeaker can be an issue. When possible, please repeat back an announcement to the class to ensure everyone heard it correctly.

-**Accents can be a challenge** for someone with hearing loss. Just because the volume may be turned up very loud, for example on video, if the characters speak with an accent, captioning is still the most effective way to circumvent this issue.

- Please highlight and include these strategies in your substitute folder. If you're absent and the substitute is not aware of the situation regarding your students with hearing loss, it could prove detrimental. I suppose the substitute won't be "trained" in using the FM device however; they would benefit from being informed of how to support the students with hearing loss.

- When a person with hearing loss has a cold and their ears become clogged, it decreases their ability to hear, even with hearing aids.

Resources

Mass. Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcdhh/>

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)

<http://hearingloss.org/>

HLAA- Boston chapter

<http://www.hearinglossboston.org/>