

How to Talk to a Loved One about Their Hearing Loss



So how often do you hear the phrase, “Hey! Let’s go shopping today...for hearing aids!”? Not very often, but when the suggestion does surface, it is usually from a family member. Family members are typically the first to notice the hearing loss of a loved one, and not the person who has it. However, trying to approach the subject can be difficult. There are a variety of challenges that you may encounter when addressing a hearing loss. For instance, there is the nature of hearing loss itself: it is a *gradual* condition that lends itself easily to denial. And because it is a physically taxing, socially isolating condition, it often robs sufferers of

energy to confront the issue. Then there is the so-called stigma of wearing hearing aids; the cost of the instruments, the loss of independence, or the lack of confidence in the instruments ability to provide help for the wearer.

So how do you talk to a loved one about their hearing loss? Well, the first step is to **understand the hearing loss** and more importantly its impact on the person and to others. This way, you can address the hearing loss and better show them the benefits personally and socially of getting help. **Show your loved one these benefits.** Discuss what they have to gain! The purpose of hearing aids is not simply to help someone hear sound better, but to improve communication and safety. There are many side-effects of hearing loss that you may not know about. For example, hearing loss can cause fatigue from trying to understand sound or speech. It can cause depression and anxiety. It has also been recently proven to have a connection with Alzheimer’s and Dementia. Hearing instruments can help reduce and/or eliminate these negative effects, as well as adding richness, energy, and variety to everyday life. They can make it easier to engage in conversations, take part in social activities, and reconnect with friends and family.

In addition to what you may read in articles or on the internet, **it is a good idea to talk to a hearing care professional**—ask questions and see what recent literature is available. *The Shopper’s Guide to Hearing Aids*, as an example, is an excellent resource for explaining to consumers what they should know and expect before they purchase hearing aids. It explains consumer rights, the latest technology, and other strategies can supplement the use of hearing aids.

Nothing is more convincing, however, than speaking to someone who has firsthand experience of using hearing aids successfully. Find someone, a friend or family member, and ask them to share their personal story and experience with before-and-after scenarios. This way, you can have a realistic picture of what it is like to live with hearing instruments. They will also be able to provide advice for both you and your loved one about starting your journey in hearing amplification.

Now, the biggest obstacle to come may not be one you'd expect: you! If you live with this person, or spend a lot of time with them, the chances are that you have become an enabler. You may have adopted the habit of repeating, explaining, and amplifying your communication on demand. In fact, you've become so good at it that it has become a reflex—and your loved one as a result is coping with their hearing loss just fine, but at your expense. You may not understand why your voice is hoarse at the end of the day, or why you feel so exhausted. The answer is simple: you've become a walking, talking, human hearing aid! Ironically, becoming aware of your enabling role could be the beginning of the path of intervention.

You may still have to break through the wall of denial that builds up. This is hard to do, one-on-one, as it could come across as being biased. **Enlist a family member or close friend to help you.** They can agree to some tough love that involves confronting him or her with the impact the hearing loss on the family. Resist coping and enabling and provide some gentle prompting every time the situation arises. In any case, behaviorists recommend that you step away from your role as “the human hearing aid.” Over time and with patience, you can then begin to have a real dialog about how much better your loved one's life can be with hearing amplification technology. And the following phrase may help, “If you won't do it for yourself, at least do it for us.”

Go from awareness to wholeness. Awareness will probably be the hardest part of the battle. Once you've achieved it, you need to keep things moving forward with positive reinforcement as you help your loved one through the process. The goal is to find a solution. This will involve getting evaluated and fitted by a hearing care professional. With a complete medical picture of you loved one's hearing loss, there's not much room for denial. Also, with the kind of product evaluation periods that many hearing care professionals offer, the adjustment can be easy and risk-free.

You should make yourself aware of the steps involved, set expectations accordingly, and make sure that the vision is always in sight of a life that is better in every way—for everyone in the family.

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