

## HEARING LOSS – NOTES FOR GROUP LEADERS

**A third of the population aged 60 to 70 have hearing loss, as do three-quarters of the over 70s.**

### HELLO GROUP LEADERS

The new Hearing Loss Network has updated some guidance that was sent out to group leaders a couple of years ago. Is there anything you could do to make life easier for those of us with hearing problems? Here are some ideas...

### TALKS

Probably the most important thing to do is to **reserve seats at the front** for people with hearing loss and, of course, people with other disabilities who might need them. Some groups have got a brilliant version of this working. Seats in the front two or three rows are reserved for people with hearing loss or other disabilities by the placing of an A4 sheet of paper with an appropriate symbol on it on the relevant seats. Easy and effective! Copies attached, courtesy of Nigel Holden.

Please **check that we can hear you**. It only takes a second. At the start of the meeting a quick “can everyone hear me? – give me a wave any time if you can’t” makes it much easier for us to say something (or wave...) if we need to. And have you thought about using one of the **headset microphones/voice amplifiers** that the committee have bought? They might make all the difference.

Many of us start to rely on seeing someone’s face (the lip shapes, the expressions) long before we identify as lip readers, so please **don’t turn your back** whilst talking (easy to forget if you’re describing something on the screen) and please check that your notes/the lectern/the music stand/the microphone **aren’t covering your lips**. Please **don’t turn the lights off** for a PowerPoint, or, if you really need to, leave a light on at the front of the room so your face is still lit. Equally, don’t stand with your back to a window – it will cast your face into shadow and make lip reading much harder.

Getting the right balance of words to images in a PowerPoint is tricky. Nobody wants to be reading the whole talk from the screen. But having **headings and some text can be helpful**, especially for unusual words. We’re sitting there thinking “what?? missed that...” but then it says on the screen “Emperor Constantine, fourth century” and it all makes sense again.

It can be very helpful to **repeat any questions** before answering them. Successfully hearing the speaker at the front of the room can be a lot easier than figuring out what someone in the back row has just said. And please try **not to drop your voice** at the end of a sentence. Or when you get to the punchline. It’s surprisingly common.

When it's the punchline it can leave us hearing the build-up but then feeling totally left out when the rest of the room starts laughing uproariously and we haven't a clue why.

If there is a **loop system** know how to turn it on and know where the microphone is. Let hearing aid wearers know at the start of each session that the loop is on (so we don't waste time fiddling with our devices and wondering if it is or not). There are currently working loop systems at the Soroptimists, St Stephens Church Hall, Skipton Friends Meeting House and the Town Hall concert hall. They need to be switched on before you begin the talk. The Town Hall concert room system needs you to use a hand-held microphone or a lapel mike.

## **GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

A nightmare for the deaf, because we need to see the person speaking. Can you **arrange the chairs in a circle**? Or in some other format where we can see the other participants? Could you think about the **size of the group** and the **suitability of the venue** when finalising numbers? Smaller groups work better for people with hearing problems.

And **we need people to speak one at a time** – which is probably a good idea anyway... Please keep reminding people if you need to.

## **WALKS AND OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES**

That "shy" person that doesn't say a lot may just not be able to hear all the banter. People with hearing loss often cope better one to one. Background noise can make a real difference – crunching along a footpath, walking past a noisy waterfall. Don't forget that lip readers can't lip read if they are having to watch their feet. And don't forget that you might need to get someone's attention first before saying something – she is not ignoring you, she didn't hear you.

## **OTHER ACTIVITY BASED GROUPS**

Again, the person who doesn't say much might just not be able to cope with all the chatter. If the activity involves concentrating on something with your eyes (calligraphy, knitting, quilting) lip readers can only "hear" when they take a break from that and look at you.

## **FILMS**

A huge thank you to our wonderful film groups for always showing films with the subtitles on. It's appreciated.

**AND THANK YOU EVERYONE**, for reading this.

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