

FYI: For Your Information...

# Working *with a* HEARING LOSS during a Pandemic



Being in the workforce and having hearing loss is an important topic, especially during the pandemic, when the work environments are changing – not to mention the use of paper/cloth masks. Adapting to working with a hearing loss, like hearing loss itself, comes in different forms, and we all have to find new ways to adapt based on our particular needs. You are not alone in this: so many of our members and friends are facing the same challenges you are. As we have highlighted, hearing loss is an invisible disability. Therefore, the related challenges one faces in the workplace may not be very evident. The person with hearing loss may be compensating in a variety of ways, such as using communication strategies and additional technology. You can find tools on our website that you can share with the people around you. Here are some tips and reminders that will help you in the workplace.

One thing we know for sure is that the more you advocate, practice, educate and share with your team and communities about the tips, the smoother communication can be.

## Tips for Speaking on the Phone with Hearing Loss:

1. Ask the speaker to speak in a deeper tone and at a slower pace.
2. Eliminate background noise. Make sure you are in a quiet place and ask the speaker to move to a quiet room and avoid having extra noise.
3. Make sure one person is speaking at a time.
4. Ask the speaker not to speak rapidly or shout.
5. Ask the speaker to rephrase rather than repeat. Some sounds are easier to hear so switching up their sentences can lead to more understanding.
6. Ask questions such as, "Did I hear this correctly?" and repeat what you heard.
7. Be patient and kind to yourself. Hearing loss is not easy and the challenges you are facing are not your fault.
8. Ask for an alternative form of communication (eg. video chat) OR a summary of what was discussed via email (or even text message).

*"One of the challenges I face at work during the pandemic is having video calls. It is difficult for me to understand what people are saying in Zoom meetings. Their webcam is not always clear so I cannot read their lips and their microphone sometimes makes an echo or glitch. I can hear them fine 80% of the time, but I fear I might miss out on something important. I have tried to use live captioning on Zoom but it does not work well. So my team has been kind enough to provide, in writing, all of the important points from meetings so I don't miss out on anything important."*



- Haruniya Ariyarajah

## Tips for Speaking on a Video Conference Call with Hearing Loss:

1. Keep in mind that usually Internet/Wi-Fi is more consistent than using cellular data. Having a clear connection can help with sound quality and the ability to speechread during video calls.
2. Ask your coworkers to use an external microphone. This helps with the sound clarity.
3. Ask your coworkers to be mindful of the lighting. Position themselves near a good source of light so you can clearly see their face and speechread.
4. Ask your coworkers to make sure their device/webcam is not facing a window. This avoids backlighting and helps you when speechreading.
5. Use a platform like Google Meet that has free computer generated live captioning.
6. The same tips apply to video conferencing as with phone calls (see page 12).

*"I wear a hearing aid in my left ear and I have a cochlear implant in my right ear. I work full time as a social worker at a special needs facility. In this new world of wearing masks, it was a real struggle for me at first, as everyone's face was covered, their voices were muffled and I could no longer rely upon my lip-reading skills, which I had done all my life. For the first two weeks, I was frustrated and wondered how I was going to cope. At times, I have had to ask staff or students to remove their masks briefly when I cannot catch something. On Zoom meetings, which are more and more frequent, I will increase the volume as needed, and I switch to the speaker-view rather than gallery view, so the person speaking is the only person I am seeing. This enables me to use my lipreading skills, if needed. However, I have not found a method to manage larger meetings where people are farther apart. This means I am having to rely on my hearing, and it is challenging for me to hear people the farther they are from me."*

- Annette Perry



*"The pandemic has changed everything as we know it. This is no different for a deaf person like myself. Understanding that masks are more important than lip-reading was frustrating at the beginning, because my accessibility became a second thought. While the development of safe, clear masks was optimistic, there still remained a lack of awareness and distribution, which only further proves that accessibility is not emphasized. In terms of school, we use the videoconferencing platform Zoom. It is appropriate for online learning, but it does not come with closed-captioning features. Recorded lectures come with automated captioning, which is often inaccurate. I get by just fine because that's what I have to do, but I do feel isolated when communicating with non-transparent masks on, because it significantly diminishes my ability to understand. People also often get frustrated when I ask them to repeat themselves or write what they are saying, and I can only self-advocate for so long... In the end, it is temporary - but for any upcoming pandemics, we should be better prepared and try to include those with disabilities as best we can!"*

- Omer Othman

