

Understanding the Role of the Family

Today's families are faced with a multitude of challenges that place great demands on their abilities to act cohesively. Strong family bonds are very important for a person with hearing loss, however, since hearing loss impacts the whole family.¹ People with hearing loss frequently feel isolated from their families. Research studies indicate that people learning to live with a hearing loss may lose confidence, feel depressed, become embarrassed, have a sense that they are being ignored, depend on other people, become withdrawn, feel isolated, feel lonely, be excluded from family and social events, or feel lethargic.^{2,3}

Support Don'ts

Family members often inappropriately respond by:

- showing frustration,
- talking for the person with hearing impairment,
- continually interpreting what the person said or implied (often doing so incorrectly),
- sacrificing attendance at social events to avoid embarrassing the person with the hearing loss, and
- giving a variety of best-guess "self-help" suggestions.^{2,3}

Support Dos

It would be more effective for family members to:

- Be patient while the person adjusts to his hearing loss.
- Provide opportunities for him to "problem solve" when communication is not ideal.
- Encourage him to ask questions to aid communication.
- Encourage him to reduce distractions.
- Encourage him to watch for non-verbal communication, such as changes in facial expressions.

At the Audiologist's Office

Families may help patients to more effectively communicate with audiologists by assisting patients in listing facts about their health and asking important questions before meeting with an audiologist.^{4,6}

When making a list of facts, include the following:



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- past and current hearing problems;
- a completed medical history form, from the audiologist;
- medications that the person is taking;
- contact information for others who have treated the family member; and
- results of laboratory reports that may help the audiologist with hearing health management.

When meeting with an audiologist, support the patient by assisting in providing the information that has been written or collected. The information is extremely helpful for the audiologist to manage hearing healthcare problems.

Additionally, it may be helpful to ask questions like:

- How much time might be needed for the examination?
- Could you give me an estimate of the costs?
- [To the audiologist:] Would you be willing to talk with family members and/or friends to help the person with hearing loss to communicate and remember what you have reported?

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