

## **4. Assisting People Who Are Hard of Hearing**

### **1) Basic Points**

#### **Smile and be considerate**

First of all, smile and greet once you make eye contact with the person you are about to assist. Even if he or she cannot hear your voice, your smile can convey your feelings. Some persons with a hearing impairment are able to speak but are hard of hearing or unable to hear. Remember to suspect such a condition if your conversation with someone does not proceed smoothly.

#### **Ask questions beforehand**

Be sure to make eye contact and address the person with a hearing impairment even if he/she is already accompanied by a sign language interpreter or companion. Ask him/her how he/she wants you two to communicate with each other (then, he/she will probably tell you, “If you speak slowly, I can read lips,” “Let’s communicate in writing,” “I’m with my sign language interpreter,” etc.).

## Different means of communication

Auditory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Hearing aid, cochlear implant: devices that amplify or replace acoustic hearing</li><li>▪ Assistive hearing aids: support systems for cochlear implant, etc.</li></ul>
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Lip-reading</li><li>▪ Gesticulation</li><li>▪ Writing</li><li>▪ Sign language, etc.</li></ul>

Select the best method for each situation, or combine several methods to be able to communicate most effectively.

Note that for those using an hearing aid or cochlear implant, conversation can be difficult in a noisy place because the devices pick up ambient noise as well.

## 2) Basics of communication

### **Face front and be willing to understand**

Position yourself in front of the person you are assisting so that both of you can see each other's face, lips, and gestures well. Make sure not to stand against the light. Make sure also not to let more than one person speak to him/her at the same time.

Pay close attention to the person's facial expressions and gestures, while being proactive and open-minded about understanding what he/she may be trying to express.

## **Speak slowly and use writing if hearing is difficult**

Speak somewhat slowly, articulating your words in a normal voice. Add gestures, if necessary. If you have difficulty understanding the assisted person's speech, do not pretend to understand it, and ask to repeat so that you can be sure.

If you encounter difficulty understanding orally, ask the person to communicate in writing. Make sure to carry a small memo pad and a pen at all times.

## **3) Pointers for helping with lip-reading**

### **Speak slowly and clearly in a normal voice, articulating your words**

There is no need to speak in a loud voice. Make sure to speak somewhat slowly, posing a little between phrases.

Good and bad examples of speech for lip-reading

Good: The waiting time is [pause] about [pause] 20 minutes [pause] behind this line.

Bad: The expected waiting time is about 20 minutes for people behind this line. [no pause]

Paraphrase yourself if you are not understood well:

For example: Please wait here. About 20 minutes.

To make sure that words are not mistaken for others of which lip movements are similar or identical, write the words with your finger on the palm of your hand.

#### 4) Pointers for written communication

If communication is difficult by lip-reading or gesticulation, use writing, with your finger on the palm of your hand, a memo pad, or a dedicated device. Be sure to carry a small memo pad and a pen with you.

In general, communication in this manner goes more smoothly if you write only key words/phrases, instead of writing every word of what you want to say. Avoid ambiguous words, and make sure that your handwriting is legible.

Good and bad examples of written communication

Good:

Waiting time 20 min. Thank you!

Bad (too long):

We're very sorry to have to ask you to wait for about 20 minutes behind this line because it's very crowded right now.

Bad (too abbreviated):

20 min thx

Some persons who use sign language on a daily basis are not good at or comfortable with written communication. Be sure to ask first if this means of communication works for them.

When there are special announcements, be sure to provide them in writing.

## **5) Sign language**

Sign language is a non-oral language that has naturally developed among people with varying degrees of hearing impairment and has become established as a full-fledged means of communication.

Knowing how to “sign” simple phrases such as greetings can facilitate your communication with those who usually use sign language.

It is often assumed that persons with a hearing or speech impairment know how to use sign language. However, this is not true: there are also those whose ability to hear was lost or deteriorated later in their lives and who have never learned to sign. Such people speak and think in their native oral language, while having a hearing impairment. Make sure to provide assistance in the way that each person desires and feels comfortable with.