

# How to talk to your family about your hearing loss

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# How to talk with your family about your hearing loss

**G**OOD for you for seeking help! You won't be sorry! Addressing your hearing concerns can make all the difference for your quality of life.

Admitting we have hearing loss shouldn't cause embarrassment, but for many it does, and telling others we don't hear well can be difficult. We might worry that asking for help, even asking someone to repeat themselves, will inconvenience and annoy our family so much that they'll stop communicating with us altogether.

However, according to social psychologist [Heidi Grant](#), "people are wired to be helpful" and not asking them for help is a mistake. The problem, she says, is "asking people for help isn't intuitive; in fact, a lot of our instincts are wrong. As a result, we do a poor job of calling in the reinforcements we need," depriving ourselves—and our family—of the chance to help one another.

Of course, we might also worry our well-intentioned supporters will become too pushy, urging us to make audiologist

appointments or get a hearing aid before we're ready. But remember their eagerness to help is actually a sign of how much they care—and that's a good thing.

So, what does it take to get the conversation just right? Be clear, honest, and specific. To help, we created a list of specific words, phrases, and questions you can use to talk about your hearing loss and help—you and your family—live better.

## Getting Started

### **I'm not hearing as well as I used to. Can we please talk about it?**

It may seem like a simple start, but being clear and direct helps your spouse or family member understand what you want to talk about and it's important to you. Using these words will likely get their full attention. If needed, set aside time free from other distractions, so you can talk openly about your thoughts and feelings.

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## **I first noticed my hearing loss about 6 months ago.**

Of course, you'll need to change the specifics. You may have lived with hearing loss for years, or just noticed trouble hearing recently. Knowing how long you've been thinking about this will help your spouse or family member better understand where you are in the journey.

## **Have you noticed that I sometimes have trouble hearing?**

This is an important part of the conversation. As Dr. Mark Ross of HearingResearch.org said, "When someone in the family has a hearing loss, the entire family has a hearing problem." Asking this question invites your listener to be part of your experience and sets the stage for working together to find solutions.

## **I seem to have the most trouble hearing when we're out in noisy places, like a restaurant or a ball game.**

Give specific examples of times when hearing loss most affects you, such as watching TV, talking on the phone, or listening in places with lots of background noise. Example: "Remember when we went shopping together and I seemed quiet? It's because I couldn't catch everything you were saying, and I wasn't sure where we were in our conversation."

It's likely that your family will have already noticed your hearing loss and be grateful that you want to talk about it. In fact, they may have other examples to share and the discussion can be healing and helpful. Talking about it can make them more aware of those moments when you may have difficulty hearing—and it gives them permission and more opportunities to help. Consider making a list of difficult hearing situations and talking about how to handle them together. This list might also be useful



for your audiologist.

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## Taking Action

### **I'd like to get my hearing checked, but I'm not sure I'm ready for a hearing aid.**

It's important to have your hearing checked by an audiologist, so don't delay making the appointment. Plan to visit the audiologist together and be aware of your options. Your family member's input will help the audiologist get a clearer picture of your situation. You can also investigate online hearing tests. For example, the MiMi Hearing Test app (available on both [Apple](#) and [Google Play](#)) can allow you to ascertain your hearing level by playing high and low frequencies. It will also let you know how you compare to others in your age range. Check out our [blog](#) for more suggestions and information!

Hearing aids are becoming more effective—and more discrete—every day. Many studies show better hearing improves overall health and wellbeing. Hearing aids are not the

only option for hearing better. You might try headphones or special listening devices that connect to your TV, so others can listen at regular volume. You might investigate “hearables”, or hearing instruments that offer noise-cancellation, sound amplification, and connection with your smartphone for music and phone calls.

You and your family can explore options together, both before and after your audiology appointment. Most importantly, you'll be on the same page about the next steps you're ready to take.

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## Communicating Better

### **I want to talk to you, so please get my attention! I'll be disappointed if you don't.**

Your family may not want to “remind” you of your hearing loss or “bother” you by getting your attention, so let them know it's more than okay to get closer, tap your shoulder, or move in front of you to start talking. This is a great chance to build your relationship by reminding your family you're interested in



them and what they have to say.

**I'll do my best to hear you the first time, but when I ask you to repeat something, please do—even if you think it's not worth the effort. I want to hear what you have to say, and I don't want to feel left out.**

We've all had the experience of asking someone to repeat something only to be dismissed with, "Oh, it's not important." Remind your family it really is important—at least to you. So much of the joy in life comes from the "little things" and those little comments or jokes bring personality to the conversation. You don't just want "critical information," you want to hear everything they have to say, big or small. Let them know "missing" parts of the conversation makes you feel excluded and you don't want to be treated differently, like being left out of "unimportant" conversations, just because of your hearing loss.

**I'm sure my hearing loss can sometimes get in the way of our communication. What can I do to help you?**

When we experience hearing loss, it's natural to focus on our own needs. But recognizing our hearing loss creates challenges for family members, too, is just as important. This question shows how much you appreciate your family and lets you address hearing loss as a team.

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## Home Improvement

**What changes can we make around the house to help me hear better?**

The conversation with your family is a great opportunity to think about the overall listening environment in your home. What is the noise level like around the house? Are there things you can do to reduce noise levels? For assistance tracking these

observations, use the [Akoio Soundscape Journal](#). Here are things you might consider:

- Listening devices for the TV, like "open ear" headphones, help you hear the TV without turning up the volume for everyone else
- Extra insulation or sound baffling around noisy appliances, like a dishwasher or clothes dryer, significantly reduces background noise (some people simply cover those appliances with a blanket when in use)
- Heaters or fans with noise-reduction features maintain the temperature in your favorite rooms while keeping the noise level down
- Window seals and/or heavier drapes reduce background noises coming from outside the home
- Inside the home, proper door seals block noises coming from other rooms (taking care of squeaky hinges can help reduce overall noise levels, too)
- Rugs for hard-surface floors keep footsteps quiet (and comfy)

You will have other ideas. As you get creative, you may find upgrading your listening environment becomes a fun "home improvement" project.

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## An Attitude of Gratitude

It's natural to focus on our own needs, but hearing loss creates challenges for family members, too.

**Thank you for talking with me about this. I'm so grateful for your help. And I'm sure we'll have more questions as we go along, so let's promise each other we'll keep talking.**

Don't forget to thank your spouse or family member for talking with you. Those simple words can express volumes of appreciation and love. It also opens the door for your spouse or family member to initiate more conversation.

**A great first step to improving your hearing health is to make a telehealth appointment with an audiologist.**

### **Connecting with an audiologist**

Many people don't feel comfortable visiting an audiologist office or any place that is unfamiliar. Therefore, a great first step to improving your hearing health is to make a telehealth appointment with an audiologist. Look for information on their website, or call and ask about their virtual options. Don't be afraid to emphasize that you are a first time patient. Express your concerns directly and keep asking questions until you have the information you need. The more you know, the more confident you will feel.

Living better with hearing loss is a journey. There will be changes and challenges along the way. Keep talking and take opportunities to share with each other what you learn. Work together on goals and plans. Admitting you have hearing loss isn't easy, but you may find a silver lining in even better communication and stronger relationships with your family and loved ones. [a](#)

