

# Hints and Tips

## Hearing loss and older people

### Why we wrote these hints and tips

Many older people are affected by some degree of hearing loss.

- More than 70 % of over 70 year-olds and 40 % of over 50 year-olds have some form of hearing loss.
- About one in ten adults in the UK have mild tinnitus and up to 1 % have tinnitus that affects their quality of life. (Tinnitus is a constant sound, often ringing, that some people experience all the time. It makes it more difficult to hear and concentrate.)

When we talked to older people who were affected by hearing loss they told us what things they found more difficult. They told us what things helped them.

These are our tips and hints to help you make your group more welcoming to older people with hearing loss.

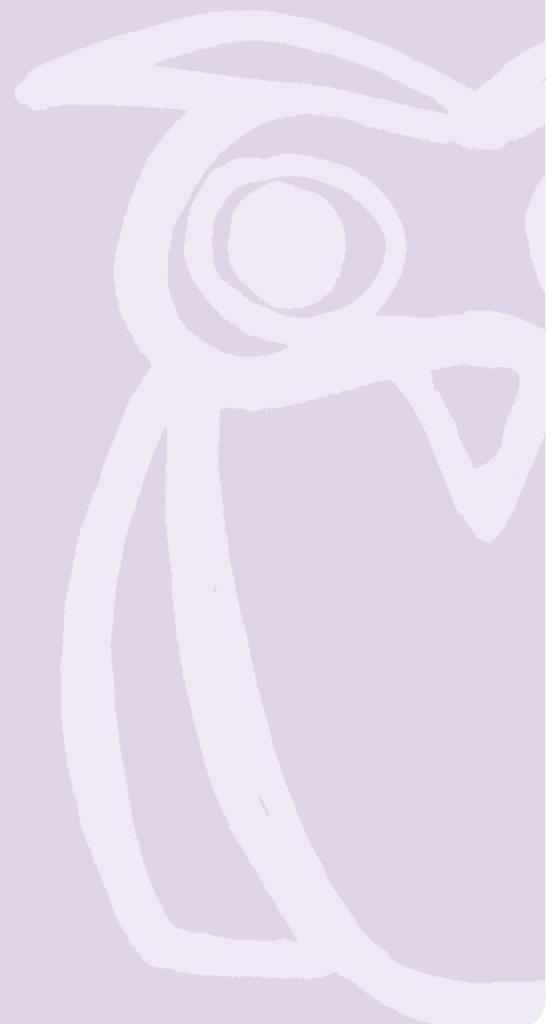
Things that people with hearing loss find difficult:

- Understanding when several people are talking.
- Understanding when a speaker's face is unseen.
- Being unaware someone is talking.
- Understanding whispering.
- Understanding people in a large room.
- Understanding unclear or accented speech.

"I kept asking people to speak up. They did to begin with and then forgot as they got more involved in the chat and catching up with friends. I just stopped asking."

"I can't participate so I might as well pack it in."

"I can't contribute so what is the point in coming to the group anymore."



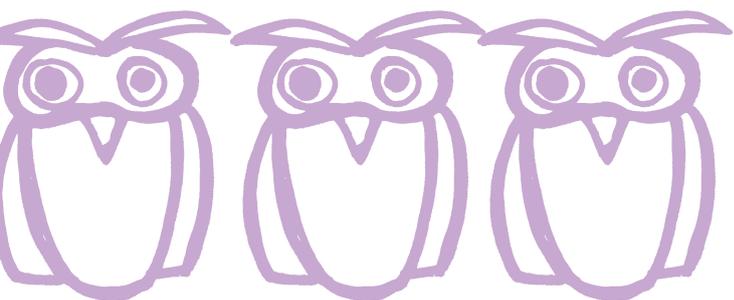
## Our tips

### Choice of room

- Try and use a venue or room that has a hearing loop system, microphone or other similar systems.
- If the centre doesn't have one – you could apply for a grant to get your own small portable system.
- Some rooms are more echo-y than others. Can you use another room?
- Rooms with carpets and soft chairs absorb noise more than ones with shiny floors or lots of other hard surfaces, so the background noise is reduced.
- Try and avoid using open areas or areas that are close to other noisy areas such as kitchens.
- Have good lighting – people can see when people are looking and talking to them. Some people lip read.

### What helps in one to one conversations

- Get the person's attention before you start speaking.
- Face the light and the person. They can see your face more clearly.
- Try and sit or stand at the same level as the person.
- Ask them if they can see and hear you OK before continuing.
- Talk a bit louder if they ask you to.
- Speak clearly and slowly but keep a natural rhythm.
- Move your lips when speaking. Don't cover your mouth or talk with something in your mouth - some people lip read.
- Some people might have a relative or friend with them. Talk to the person, not to the relative or friend.
- Show emotion through the sound of your voice and the expression in your face. A happy face helps people understand what you are saying.



### In groups

It is harder for people with hearing loss when with a group of people.

- Look at the tips that help when talking one to one.
- Try and use a room with a hearing loop system or something similar.
- Arrange the room so that people are in small groups and people can easily see everyone in the small group.
- Don't have background music.
- Have breaks for refreshments. People can mix and chat to different people.

**"I sit with my friends. They know me and make sure I'm involved in the chat while we are sewing."**

### Discussion in groups

- Make sure everyone knows what the topic is about.
- Make sure everyone knows who is going to speak next before they start.
- Take turns to speak.
- Don't change topics without any warning.
- Make sure everyone knows what you are talking about before you continue.

**"We all have lots to say. We have lots of breaks so we can chat to our neighbour and then we are all quiet and take turns to talk to the whole group. That way we all enjoy ourselves."**

**"I get John to sit on my right side. I can hear better on that side."**

### Guest speakers and discussion groups

- If possible use a room with a loop system, microphone or something similar.
- Arrange the room so that people can sit closer to the speaker.
- Give speakers some tips before they come.
- Pace the meeting and discussion. Have breaks and gaps between speakers or different topics.
- Don't change the topic without any warning.
- Provide a brief written summary of what the meeting is about. People can read it before they come. When people know what the topic is it helps them follow the speaker and the discussion.
- Give out written information at the end to read later. Include details of who to get in touch with for more information.

**“Some speakers rustle their papers – it sounds really loud to me.”**

**“It is more tiring when we have a guest speaker – I have to concentrate. We have lots of breaks in between. We can all have a chat with our friends and the people sitting next to us. Then we are all quiet again when the next speaker starts.”**

## **Ask what people find helpful**

Our main message is to ask people what things help them.

These are tips that will make things easier for many people who have a hearing loss.

People experience hearing loss in different ways and have found their coping strategies. Each person will be able to tell you in more detail what works for them.

**“We got someone from another group to come and talk to us. They told us what things their group did to help them.”**

**“A couple of our members told us what they found difficult and what helped them.”**

## **More information**

**Deaf Action – Scotland** provides information for people with hearing loss and training for groups and organisations.  
[www.deafaction.org.uk](http://www.deafaction.org.uk)

**Action Hearing Loss UK** provides fact sheets on hearing loss, information about equipment and awareness sessions on hearing loss. There are local offices in Scotland.  
[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

## **About Wisdom in Practice**

Wisdom in Practice is a project which supports and promotes the development of services and other activities led by older people. It is funded by the Scottish Government through the Equalities Programme and is run by Outside the Box.

There is a range of resources for groups, including publications, how to guides, events and development support for individual groups and projects.

This is one of a series of Hints and Tips for services and other activities led by older people. Other hints and tips include Dementia Friendly Groups, Getting Started, Getting Organised, Finding the Funds.

Wisdom in Practice has its own website  
[www.wisdominpractice.org.uk](http://www.wisdominpractice.org.uk)



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