

2020

How to Talk About  
**HEARING LOSS**

# How to talk to your family about your hearing loss

Part of the *How to Talk About Hearing Loss* series  
provided exclusively for members of [Akoio.com](https://akoio.com)

akoio™

# How to talk with your family about your hearing loss

**A**DMITTING we have a hearing loss shouldn't cause embarrassment, but for many it does, and telling others that we don't hear well can be difficult. We might worry that asking for help, even asking someone to repeat themselves, will so inconvenience and annoy our family 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 that "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 that 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 that 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, be honest, and be

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.

According to social psychologist Heidi Grant, "people are wired to be helpful" and not asking them for help is a mistake.

## 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 that 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.

## **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 talking in large groups. 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 already have 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 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.



---

## 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 that 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.

Hearing aids are becoming more effective—and more fashionable—every day. And there are many studies that show better hearing improves overall health. But 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” that not only offer noise-cancellation and sound amplification, but also connect 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.

---

## 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 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 that 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 that it really is important—at least to you. So much of the joy in life comes from the “little things” and those little comments, jokes, or asides 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 that “missing”



parts of the conversation makes you feel excluded and that 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 that 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.

---

## **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 overall noise levels? Here are things to 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 that upgrading your listening environment becomes a fun "home improvement" project.

---

## **An Attitude of Gratitude**

**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 that 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.

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. [a](#)

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