

*Effectively
Communicating
With Someone Who
Reads Lips
And other related facts.*

Thank you for taking the time to read this. We only reference our friends to this web site. This brief paper deals with hearing loss, communication, transportation and more. This is only about 4,500 words and takes but a few minutes to read.

As we are becoming closer friends, I would like to share with you a ten-page booklet that will help you better understand my wife's hearing loss and nerve damage. She is determined to function in the hearing world in as much a normal fashion as possible; however, that does not change the fact that she comprehends almost nothing through hearing, even when wearing her hearing aids. She is a cripple in her hearing as a person is cripple in his eyes who cannot see but a shadow, or a person who cannot walk but a few steps is cripple in his feet/legs. Being deaf places some responsibilities on the shoulders of those who want to communicate with her.

Thank you for taking the time to read the booklet (a download is free), and for your extra effort on behalf of my wife.

My wife and I only reference a select few people to this web site. Those who are asked to read this brief presentation are those we want to get to know better, and those we feel sincerely want to get to know us better. Most people have many casual acquaintances but few real friends. We are interested in developing a close and ongoing friendship with you. That is why we directed you to this website.

My wife (Laura) is legally deaf. She reads lips. When she was three-years old she was bitten by a poison spider and given an overdose of antibiotics; an antibiotic that is no longer given because it was discovered that it had the side effect of nerve damage. The overdose (adult dosage for 3 year old child) was particularly disastrous for her. That is why my wife cannot hear; nerve damage.

She does not "sign". She was sent to "signing class" for the deaf when she was in elementary school but refused to learn the art because she felt it was too restrictive to be able to communicate only with those who can sign. She asked to be taught lip reading. Her request was granted. She learned to read lips.

My wife worked hard to learn to lip read, and does an excellent job; better than most with the severity of her hearing and tone comprehension loss. Because she was good at lip reading she was never reassigned to "signing" class, and has never had an interest in learning to sign.

This booklet is designed to help those who want to communicate with her to know how to do that. As well, other relevant things are covered.

COMMUNICATION

I recognize that not everyone one wants to communicate with everyone else, and that is fine. Not everybody likes everybody else or is drawn to

fellowship with everyone else. For those who are content having a casual relationship with my wife where the major of the conversation is passive and common such as, "How you doing?" "How are you?" "Good morning?" and "See you later.", then there is no need to read this booklet because my wife is sharp enough at lip reading to understand who feels drawn to have in-depth conversation with her and who is not, and can respond to those who seek casual conversation by catching one of the words above or watching facial features and filling in the blanks and know to say "Fine", or "Okay".

However, for those who would like to get to know her better and develop a relationship with her as a closer friend, something will be required of such folks.

For best communication, you need to:

1. Square your body or head towards her somewhat, and look at her when you talk with her. She has to see your lips to read them. When people turn their backs or turn sideways (too much) and keep talking it makes it impossible for her to see their lips to read them. It is like a hearing person trying to listen to someone who does not use their vocal cords when communicating.

2. Communicate with her one to one and not in a group. She cannot keep up with group conversation. No lip reader can. By the time she knows who is talking in the group that person is finished and another person is talking. That is why she avoids as many "group sharing" meetings as possible such as group sharing Sunday school classes, Bible studies, home meetings, or group meals. It isn't that she could not enjoy them if she heard the conversation or that she does not enjoy the fellowship, it is that trying to keep up with the constant flow of conversation when she does not know who is talking is impossible. More than that it is very nerve racking for her. She spends many Monday morning with ice on her swollen eyes because of trying to read the lips of the Sunday school teacher, keep up with class discussion and talk with people after services. She likes doing all of these things. But, it is very difficult for her. Sunday meals with others is something she mostly cannot do. It is just too hard to add another group meeting to her on Sunday.

3. Speak normally and in a normal tone of voice. Remember, she is learning your lip movement and will watch you speak to others to learn to read your lips, so to change the way you speak to her makes it more difficult for her to learn your lip patterns. And, talking loud to a person that cannot hear is like writing in large letters to a person who cannot see; pointless, and a little silly.

4. Be prepared to repeat yourself. Lip reading is hard work. In the blink of an eye a word or two is missed. My wife is good at lip reading, but even the best lip readers under the best circumstances get about 80% of the words spoken by others. When my wife feels the person is truly

interest in carrying on a meaningful conversation with her, she will ask the person to repeat themselves. Otherwise, she simply fills in the blanks where she misses a word or two and responds accordingly. Usually, she gets it right.

5. Understand that she is not stupid. People who lip read seldom carry on long conversations or get all the words in a conversation. That is not because they are stupid, but because they are handicapped. My wife is extremely talented, wise, and intelligent. Those who do the work to communicate with her know that. A blind person may be very intelligent but trip over things left in the walkway or not be able to read a street sign. In most cases, those with handicaps that get along in a world with others without the same handicap are generally very intelligent.

6. Get rid of foreign objects in your mouth, such as gum, food, mints, sun-flower seeds, ect. Look in the mirror and watch your lips as you say "brother" and "other." Notice how little difference there is in the movement of your lips. Say, "surface" and then "service." Notice how little difference there is in your lip formation of those words. Now, put something in your mouth and say the same words. Notice the change in your lip formation. Lip readers "learn" a person's lips, and when a person has foreign objects in their mouth it changes slightly the formation of all words, even if the person is not chewing. Now, if you chew gum, and will place the gum in exactly same place in your mouth every time you speak to her or around her to others (remember she is learning your lips while you speak to others as well as to her) so that your lip movements are the same always, then she can learn your lips well. Nobody keeps gum in their mouth in the same place always, so the bottom line is that those who chew gum (or have any foreign substance) in their mouth cannot communicate well with my wife.

Even if a person is able to have a foreign object in their mouth without that foreign object influencing their lip formation of words (which no one can) there is still the terrible distraction of having to read lips with a floating piece of gum in the mouth. If you can, imagine the distraction of focusing on a person's mouth only to see a piece of gum at one side one moment and then at the other side the other movement. It looks like a floating tooth. For hearing people, think of it this way. You are listening to someone talk and every 2 seconds they say, "Whoop, whoop". Now, in reality the "whoop, whoop" is just extra sound and does not figure into the conversation. If you would simply ignore the 30 or 40 "whoop whoops", every minute all would be well. However, "whoop whoop" is something of an audio distraction, isn't it. The same thing holds true for a lip reader. If you have a foreign object in your mouth, it is unkind to say, "Well just ignore it!" A lip reader can no more ignore a floating gum wad in your mouth than you can ignore "whoop whoop" 40 times a minute. We ask for consideration. Please.

We have become aware that many people love their gum (or mints) and are not about to spit it out for anyone or for any reason. And, that is their right. However, it makes it impossible for my wife to communicate

beyond “Hi.” And, for those who prefer gum (or other foreign objects in their mouth) to communication with her, we are not offended. We just want you to know that my wife is not being cold towards you when she does not communicate. She cannot read your lips well enough to carry on a conversation. No lip reader can. You have never heard of a “Lip-reader’s Banquet” or “Luncheon.”

Also, being around gum chewers is nerve racking for my wife. Her eyes are always and instinctively looking for the moving mouth to best insure she gets every word. When a person chews gum in a group setting she has to work really hard to keep her eyes off of the person chewing gum so she can better catch the first words of those speaking; thus, she will always miss the majority of the conversation of the gum chewer when they talk. It is the same thing as a hearing person listening to one person while another is saying, “Hey, listen to this!” “Hey, guess what!?” all the time, but never or seldom really saying anything. When a person is chewing gum in a group meeting, I allow my wife to leave if it becomes too nerve-racking for her.

My wife’s major physical problem is severe full body nerve damage. Her loss of hearing is a symptom (by-product) of that nerve damage. So, she can become quite nervous (because of nerve damage). Therefore, I encourage her to adjust her environment when she can do so gracefully, if it will help her. Most people, unless they read this article, never know she is deaf or has nerve damage.

Sometimes people chew gum or keep a mint constantly in their mouth because they have chronic halitosis. Be aware that chronic bad breath is a symptom of a serious physical problem. Those so afflicted need to see a doctor about it, rather than attend constantly to the symptom (bad breath).

7. Men, shave. “Lip reading” is a bit misleading. Lip readers read faces. The entire face is involved in formulating words and expressions are a big part in lip reading. Just like an exclamation mark is made by the voice and a question if apparent to those hearing because of tone and variation of voice, so with the lip reader, facial expressions all around the lips as well as the twinkle or strain in the eye provide the lip reader with clarity of conversation. Now, we recognize that beards and mustaches are beloved by many who wear them and we are not suggesting that every man with a beard and a mustache shave it off. We are clarifying that for my wife to try to read the lips of some with a mustache is like you trying carry on a conversation with someone that only pronounces and expresses every 6th word. Soon, you would tire of a conversation like this.

Hello...know...week. We...trip...is...we...bad...forecast...?

What would be your answer to this question?

The question is: “Hello. I was wonder if you know what the forecast was for next week. We are planning a trip out of town, that is my wife and I,

and we want to avoid any bad weather. Do you know the weather forecast for next week?"

Would you not soon tire of trying to have a conversation with a person that only gives you ever 5th or 6th word or syllable to work with? Would you not rather stab yourself in the face than have to endure such conversation? When a person has a mustache, this is the kind of conversation the person with hair on their lip is offering. When a person has a beard (of any thickness), her comprehension is much worse.

Again, we are not mandating men with beards or mustaches be clean-shaven. We are just letting you know why she will not carry on a conversation with you. She cannot. It would be like asking you to listen to a conversation through a wall. Impossible. Be kind and simply do not talk with my wife if you have a beard or mustache beyond hello and goodbye. She can read a smile, and that is always welcome. We are not trying to offend, but she is upset when someone with a beard or mustache expects her to carry on a conversation. It is not possible.

Years ago, when we were young, we were members of a church with a pastor that grew a beard for a few weeks each year. I am not sure why. I did not, in the early years, understand my wife's "hearing" needs and I made her go to church and sit through the preaching. She hears ("lip reads") nothing. So, to our church friends, please do not think less of my wife if she is not in church if a guest speaker has hair on his face. If all you were going to get was gibberish, you would find something else more productive to do, also.

8. Don't make jokes of any kind about her being deaf.

You would not push a blind man down the stairs just to watch him fall and then think that fall was funny. Likewise, do not cover your mouth so she cannot see your lips and then speak to others. That is unkind. Do not speak to others with your hand covering your mouth and then laugh at her because she could not hear you. That is not funny to her. It is cruel.

WHY WE USUALLY DECLINE INVITATIONS TO RESTURANTS

This is why we seldom invite others to dine with us or accepted an invitation to dine with others. It is toooooo much work for my wife to try to communicate when people are eating. When she is up to having a meal with friends, we do it. She likes the fellowship but has to be rested and in the mood to do the extra and significant work of trying to read lips while others are eating. Sometimes, I will tell her what the other person said. Don't be offended when that happens to you. And, again, because of the stress of Sunday, after church meals with others is usually too much for her. Please do not be offended if we seldom accept an invitation to eat with others on a Sunday. Thank you.

Don't misunderstand me. My wife and I enjoy sharing a meal with friends. There is something special about sharing a meal with someone. We look forward to it. It is just that it takes a lot of effort on the part of my wife, and she has to rest up for it. Sunday is the wrong day because of lip

reading the preacher from a distance. And, it takes a lot of effort on the part of those we enjoy a meal with because they are put in the awkward position of knowing that unless they communicate with my wife between bites and with no food in their mouth and while looking in the direction of my wife and only while she is looking them, that my wife cannot keep up with the conversation at the table. That is a lot to ask of people, but that is the real need. We have found that many people would rather not eat a meal with us because of the pressure it puts on them. We understand. You would be surprised how many of us talk with food in our mouths or while staring down into our plates.

My wife will communicate with others at the table before the meal and after the meal, but she cannot communicate with others during the meal unless individuals speak with no food in their mouth. In reality, few rid their mouth of food before talking at the table.

OTHER LIMITATIONS AND THEIR CAUSE

My wife had nerve-damage which affects her whole body, not just her hearing. The antibiotics damaged her nervous system from head to toe. The most apparent physical manifestation is loss of hearing. However, there are other subtle physical manifestations such as nervousness. She is suppose to be on valium all of the time but refuses to take it due to the negative side effects. Therefore, she “manages” her life to function with the nerve damage the best she can. She needs a little more sleep than others, and she does not expose and she tries to avoid situations that make her more nervous. For example, she avoids groups as much as possible. People in groups talk, and she cannot communicate with or in groups. She does not trust anyone’s driving but mine. So, when we go places with others we take or car or they ride with us. This is partly because she had a neck injury some years ago that become aggravated when people drive in any manner less than smoothly. Most do because it does not bother them or their regular passengers.

Church services are very hard on her. Think about how small the lips of a person are, and how little movement there is in most people’s lips when they speak. Then, put that person at a pulpit 15 or 20 feet away. Then have that person moving about the platform, and turning their head to speak towards the other side of the room in an effort to speak towards everyone in the room. How would you feel after one hour if I put you in a poorly lit room, 20 feet away from a man that was holding up one word at a time at speaking rate of 200 words a minute with letters of one half inch in height? It would be physically and mentally draining. That is the way my wife feels after every service. She goes home and collapses after every church service; her head spinning and her neck in knots. She does remarkably well and most people never know she is deaf unless they are told, but it is a lot of work for her. Evening services are even more difficult for reasons I will share with you, upon request.

Sometimes, Laura does wear hearing aids and they help slightly. She can hear sounds, but they are distorted. For example, she cannot distinguish between a baby crying and a police siren, or clap and or a yell,

or distinguish words from gibberish. The nerve damage destroyed her "clarity of reception of sound" as well as the "amount of sound she can hear." Her hearing aids are set so high that they will turn off in the presence of a person who yells. So, raising one's voice only makes it harder for her to communicate. Speak normally.

My wife has chosen to live and communicate in the hearing world to the best of her ability. Although she does remarkably well, like all people with a physical limitation, she sincerely appreciates those who understand.

The Bible tells us that the strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak. When we are in the presence of blind people, everyone knows what to do to assist them. When we are in the presence of hard of hearing people, we all know to speak loudly so they can hear us. When we are in the presence of people without an (or the use of an) arm, or leg, we instinctively know their handicap and can assist them. However, deaf people are different. Their handicap cannot be seen. Therefore, it is easier to assume that they are not "that" handicapped. And, the better they are at functioning in the hearing world, the less they seem handicapped. My wife works hard to appear normal, speak normally, and function in the hearing world normally. Doctor after doctor has told me that there is no way she should be able to function in the hearing world nearly as well as she does; still, she does it.

This article tells hearing people how they can help "bear the weaknesses of my wife who cannot hear". It is my thinking that a decent person that sees a blind person in need will assist with directions or leading. I think a godly person who sees a man with no arm that needs to pick up something with two hands will assist the handicapped person by picking up the item and placing it in the one hand of the individual. It is hard for me to conceive of an honorable Christian individual that will keep gum in their mouth when trying to communicate with my wife. That puts the greater burden on my wife who is the weaker in the communication link and seems to me a direct violation of godly behavior given God tells the Christian to "bear the burdens of the weak" not "increase their burden". Maybe I am wrong? If so, please help me see where I am wrong. Thank you.

She does not hear her voice, but feels the vibrations of her speech. Most deaf people talk loudly. She will on occasion but usually keeps the "vibrations" within customary levels of the average hearing person. I find her abilities awesome.

Thank you your effort. It is much appreciated.

TRANSPORATION

In 1988, a chiropractor seriously misadjusted my wife's neck and she has had trouble since with her neck going out of place. About 80% of the time her neck "goes out" when she is in a car driven by someone else for more than a few miles. Otherwise, her neck almost never gives her trouble. I can only think of two instances in the last 17 years when her

neck went out of adjustment when she was not in a car driven by someone other than me. For this reason, she almost never rides in vehicles driven by someone besides me.

We have not found a chiropractor in Milton yet, and if her neck goes out it is a long way to Chattanooga to visit the person who she trusts to do her neck adjustments. We have taken short rides with others driving since we have been in Milton, and her neck has not gone out, but we limit the rides to a couple of miles at most; any further than that, we are taking an unnecessary chance.

It is not a case of others being poor drivers, but accelerating and turning corners has to be super gentle for her and stopping must be early and very gradual. Part of the reason for the caution is her nerve damage; the other part is deafness. Deaf people "feel" things more than hearing people; it is the case for everyone that when one of the senses lacks the others intensify. Because of the nerve damage, and through no fault of her own, and she lives "on edge," and any kind of driving that her mind determines or her body "feels" is aggressive, erratic, or abrupt heightens her tension, locks up her neck and puts her neck immediately out of adjustment. A severe headache and uncontrollable dry heaves usually follow on the spot. Everything else stops, including the car she is in. The destination will not be reached. The evening out is over. The dry heaves, of course, only make her neck more out of adjustment, and the situation speedily worsens. So, we are being wise and considerate to other to be cautious. If you want to know how my wife feels in a car it is easy to imagine. While you are driving place your head on either shoulder (or as close as you can get to your shoulder) by moving your head and not raising your shoulder. How does that effect your perception and balance? That's the feeling for her all of the time.

My mother, as a result of a water skiing fall in her youth, had much of these same problems with her neck. In addition, she was born with some kind of nerve damage though I am not sure how to explain it. The medical profession was not advanced enough to tell her parents much beyond she will be "nervous" all her life. I watch my father, all my life at home, show loving concern and care for her special needs. I had shingles when I was an infant and have some damage to my nervous system as well, though not nearly as severe as my wife's. I have an inkling of how she feels. All of these factors combine to make caring for my wife's special needs second nature for me. God is good in how he prepared her for me, and me for her.

In order to learn to drive in a manner that protects her health, I drove with a near full glass of water on the dash board for many, many miles. When I am driving with her in the car, I pretend that near full glass of water is still on the dash board. It demands unusual attention to driving details and concentrating on traffic near and blocks ahead. It is too much to ask or expect others to drive in such an over-gentle manner when she is in the car, and we understand that. Starting, stopping, turning and speed of

the vehicle are all factors that are adjusted for my wife's comfort and health.

In the years ahead, if we opt to drive our own vehicle when going to a common location, I know none of my friends will be offended, especially since you know this information.

Joda

Web Site: www.LuLu.com/JodaCollins

Phone: 850 981-3355

Joda's Email: DrJLCollins@aol.com

Laura's Email: Rageydoll@aol.com