

This article is based on a PowerPoint presentation by Michael Eury and HLAA North Carolina.

Invisible No More

Hearing Loss is an Invisible Issue simply because one can rarely tell that another has a hearing loss by looking at him or her. Yes, you might be able to see a hearing aid or cochlear implant. Nevertheless, just looking doesn't change things. Our HLAA video, "Let's Make It Clear" shows a waitress, a receptionist and a doctor trying to converse with a hard of hearing (HOH) woman. In the one vignette, the waitress says the woman is too young to have a hearing problem, the receptionist is simply too busy to notice or to really care. She needs to get her work done. The doctor is simply forgetful. She's told him she has a hearing loss; he just gets too involved and has never created an ongoing behavior that treats everyone as if they have a hearing loss. (That has become a protocol for aids. "If I treat everyone as if they have aids, I won't miss an aids patient and I won't appear to be discriminating.") If I treat everyone as if they have a hearing loss, I will notice how much they pay attention to me and how respected they feel.

In turn, HOH People "often feel isolated because one of our vital senses is fading away, creating communications challenges. We sometimes feel marginalized by those who do not understand or lack the patience to deal with our hearing loss." In general, we become discounted because no one thinks of our issues or has an idea as how to help. Even our churches forget us. They discount us each week when they don't provide assistive devices or even a PA. "I don't need a microphone, people can hear my—you can hear me, can't you." "While accommodations for those with other disabilities are increasingly common, they are rarely found for people with hearing loss." People will jump to assist a person in a wheel chair, and rightly so, but will totally ignore the HOH person who says I can't hear.

At the same time, we are our own worst enemy. We will bluff our way through conversations even to the point of appearing foolish or ignorant because we didn't understand the comments. We even try to hide our hearing aids so that others won't know we have a problem. One of the sales promotions of those tiny aids is

to disguise hearing loss. Vanity is an issue for many people. Others are afraid they will lose their jobs if their hearing loss is known and there may be some truth in that as well. The advertisers that want us to hide our loss are winning. “The hearing public simply turns a deaf ear” to more than 48 million (The Center for Hearing and Communication) people who have a hearing loss.

“It’s time to make hearing loss invisible no more!”

“It is our responsibility—and our moral imperative—to reach out to others who are beginning their journey into hearing loss, and to educate the hearing public about our condition and our needs.” Here’s how:

- “Every personal encounter is an opportunity to share a story or a fact about hearing loss”.
If nothing else, share your “MY STORY” on www.hearinglossky.org.
“Step out of your comfort zone and be an ambassador for people with hearing loss.”
- “Inform those around you of your hearing loss and communication needs...but do so with a smile, with grace, and with patience.”
- “When you notice others with hearing aids or CIs, say hello. This is a great way to make friends, to network for HLAA, and to extend a helping hand to those in need.”
- “When you meet or know someone in denial about their hearing loss, be welcoming and non-threatening. Prepare an ‘elevator speech’ with an important fact about hearing loss.
Let them know they’re not alone, and that life is much sweeter once they address their hearing loss.”
- “Inform—and remind—your hearing family and friends of the importance of hearing protection. From iPods to vacuuming, they’re constantly assaulted by potentially damaging sounds.”
- “Inform—and remind—your coworkers and/or employees of the importance of hearing protection.”

- “Inform service employees of the importance of hearing protection. If your landscaper doesn’t wear hearing protection when mowing your yard ... loan him yours!”
- “On city sidewalks and in other noisy environments, subtly teach others to protect their hearing by covering your ears. Most aren’t aware that fire trucks, ambulances, construction work, etc. pose threats to their hearing.”
- “Promote yourself as a hearing-loss speaker at civic groups in your community.”
- “Churches offer the speaker a venue for informational and inspirational talks. Consider ‘faith sharing’ by relating your personal struggles with hearing loss.”
- “Write letters to your local newspaper or to magazines about hearing-related issues such as:
 - accessibility limitations in public places
 - lack of insurance coverage for hearing aids”
- “Place HLAA chapter/state booths or tables at area:
 - hearing expos,
 - health fairs,
 - senior/aging seminars.
 - church bazaars
 - street fairs and community festivals, and
 - county fairs and state fairs.”

It’s up to YOU to help us become invisible no more!

Stop dreaming about a world where

- hearing instruments are considered as common as eyeglasses
- every broadcast is captioned
- every public gathering place is looped
- insurance companies cover the costs of our hearing instruments...

Adapted from: Invisible No More Power Point Presentation by Michael Eury and HLAA North Carolina.

Visit the HLA-NC web site at www.nchearingloss.org, where you can download this presentation

at www.nchearingloss.org/programs.htm Or read the companion article at www.nchearingloss.org/article_InvisibleNoMore.htm.

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