

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Pea in My dad's Ear: Tips for Accommodating Hearing Loss in the Family

by Pamela Thomas Joseph, Daughter and Speech Language Pathologist

My dad is an awesome man. When I recall my years growing up, one of the things that strike me was what a good listener my dad was — at each stage of my life, he never failed to simply let me talk!

He had so many stories up his sleeve — stories of yester-years, real stories, made-up stories, stories with morals in them, stories of wisdom etc. I always looked forward to hearing them.

Visiting friends and family often broke out in laughter at some story he was relating, or pondered on the wealth of wisdom of his words.

At some point in his life, he became quieter and I sensed that his hearing was failing. It's never easy getting a horse to water and Pa took his time getting his hearing tested and acquiring his hearing aid (My brother calls it the 'pea in his ear')

The day he did acquire the pea (hearing aid), his eyes widened, face brightened and his words came flowing back bringing richness again in his interactions. I now have my remarkable father back as he was years before. His granddaughters think the world of him.

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I share this story as hearing loss is often a not seen-so-not-dealt with challenge that affects many-both the person with the hearing loss and his/her loved ones.

Besides the obvious need to get your loved one to the audiologist and have his hearing status accurately assessed and managed, there are many things you can do at home to show concern, care and to accommodate their needs.

Listings

Upcoming Workshops/Conferences

1. Siblings Are Special Too

About: A talk cum workshop for families coping with the challenges of relationships among siblings when one child requires more attention than the others

Date: 16 October 2010

Enquiries: refer to www.carespeech.com for details

2. Speech Sound Disorders in Children: the Basic and Beyond II

Speakers: Dr. Caroline Bowen (Speech-Language Pathologist, Macquarie University, Australia)

Date: 24 & 25 November 2010

Venue: Legend Hotel, Kuala Lumpur

Enquiries: pamelatj@speechhelp.com / +6012-3152799

Know of an upcoming workshop/seminar/conference?

Share with us! E-mail to editorialwe@mash.org.my

The Pea in My dad's Ear: Tips for Accommodating Hearing Loss in the Family (continued)

I have listed some of these things here in the hope that they may inspire you to accommodate rather than retaliate as your parent works toward having his/her hearing challenge addressed.

- Modify your house acoustically (i.e reduce reverberation of sound) by having plants, cushions, rugs and curtains that absorb unwanted noise and makes speech easier to listen to.
- Keep noise to the minimum:
 - ⇒ Ensure that music is kept at a low volume at social gatherings at home
 - ⇒ Keep the TV turned off at social gatherings at home
- Rearrange your home!
Ensure that your dining/living/or whatever space where most conversation takes place is clear of competing sound.
- Ensure your home has good lighting –so your parents can still obtain visual cues from your lips/face as you speak. Yellow lighting may be romantic but can take away the remaining visual cue your loved one depends on. Choose day-lights instead which have a warm and nice effect.

If we'd get a pair of spectacles to the window of our world, why not hearing aids to the door of our soul?

- Going out:
If you are thoughtful enough in accommodating the parent, dining out can still be a highly enjoyable experience.
Be early at dinners /weddings/church! This allows your parent the choice of choosing the best location to sit – e.g closer to the speakers at talks/seminars so as to get good visuals, away from the blasting music at weddings.

- Favour the better ear!
It helps that your parent can always choose to sit with his ear to the person he chats with/needs to listen to most.
My dad has a perennial joke that at church, his best ear goes to the priest and his wife on his other side.
- Engage your parents in one-to-one conversation as opposed to group conversations wherever possible (especially when speaking about important matters) – it is much easier to listen to one voice rather than sieving conversation from many voices.
- Change how we speak to help with the flow in hearing for our loved one:
 - ⇒ Speak normally but with your best pronunciation and voice. Refrain from covering your mouth/ speaking with food in it!
 - ⇒ DO NOT speak very slowly as this distorts your speech signal altogether making it harder for your loved ones to decipher your speech
 - ⇒ Finish your sentences!
 - ⇒ Use shorter sentences than usual
 - ⇒ Ensure the parent is following the conversation before rambling – they are important and it is worth every while to be part of your conversation. Words like “ Forget it ; why bother talking” hurts.
 - ⇒ Repeat key words
- e.g. Child : “I met Pak Haji at the market. Pak Haji asked about you.”
Parent : “...oh, Pak Haji. Ah...”
Child: “When to the market and saw Pak Haji. He asked about you.”
Parent: “Who ? ah.. where you saw him ?”
Child : repeats.....
 - ⇒ Let your first topic opener/sentence be like a conversational header
- e.g. “Ma, you know Aunty Sheila. Well, she's not well. Shall we visit her?”
Topic header : Aunty Sheila.
- Provide non-threatening information about hearing assessments, protocols and options so the parents can make an informed decision.

For a list of qualified and ethical audiologists in Malaysia, do view MASH's recently updated membership list at www.mash.org.my. Protect yourself and your loved ones and embrace a new world of hearing with informed choices.