

# First Job Considerations

## 1. Find out what you like to do and what you are good at.

In *Summer Jobs and Beyond: A Guide for Teens with Hearing Loss*, Claire Blatchford wrote: "What do you like to do, and what are you good at? Think about it. Get out a pencil and paper and jot everything down if that helps. Could you have written any of these?"

*"I love animals. I'm the only one who feeds and walks our dog."*

*"Digital cameras, computers, making videos. I know more about electronics than anybody in my family."*

*"My friends say I bake the best cookies. I can make a three-layer birthday cake with a pudding filling."*

*"I am a good driver. My family has six cars, a small driveway, and my Dad is always asking me to move the cars so he can get out."*

If you're having trouble making a list, your parents, siblings, or your best friend may be able to help you."

Communication should also be able to be fully explored when answering this question.

For example, if given a choice, would you prefer to work with other people, or work alone? Communication demands would be different in a job that requires interaction with others, versus a job that is primarily carried out on your own.

Examples would be waiting on tables, or working at a drive-thru window at a restaurant. Deaf and Hard of Hearing teens can (and do) work in these environments, with great success and enjoyment - if you are willing to advocate for yourself. This would involve knowing what reasonable accommodations are, and what your rights are. By law, employers cannot discriminate and should be

able to provide the necessary accommodations for a teen who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

If the job requires you to communicate on the telephone or use a headset, it will be important to find out what is needed to be able to do so, and to learn how to communicate those needs to managers, other employees, and customers (if applicable).

Some jobs require teens to walk up to strangers and strike up a conversation, such as in a clothing store. How comfortable is this for you, both in terms of personality and communication skills?

Teens with typical hearing may seek out jobs in retail settings or fast food restaurants, as these are the jobs that are readily available for those who do not have previous work experience. Unfortunately, these types of communication environments may be quite difficult due to background noise, piped in music, and a fast-paced environment.

It can be discouraging to consider these realities. It is important to develop a plan for dealing with them, and to be creative when thinking about ways to overcome the obstacles.

For example, in which jobs would it be an asset to be Deaf or Hard of Hearing, and why? What are the obstacles, and what are ways around them?

## **2. Prepare for the job interview.**

One way to develop a plan to overcome communication obstacles is to put extra effort into other areas, such as in preparing for the job interview.

An important question to think about before the interview is “Why do you want this job?” An obvious answer is “to make money,” but it is not the one that prospective employers want to hear. It is important to practice beforehand with common interview questions.

Another thing to consider before the interview is when to disclose that you are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. There is no right answer to this question. One adult who has a profound hearing loss said:

*"I did not disclose my hearing loss during an interview because the job did not appear to have communication demands that would be a problem for me. However, on the first day of the job, I found out that I would need to answer the phone and take down information such as names, dates, and phone numbers. I knew I would freeze every time the phone rang, and that I would not enjoy working there. Now, I always disclose my hearing loss - if it is going to be a "problem," in any sense of the word, I would rather know ahead of time."*

Be prepared for panel or group interviews, which are becoming increasingly popular. Gael Hannan, an adult who is Hard of Hearing and a prolific writer, wrote about self-identifying in a positive way in the context of a group interview:

<http://hearinghealthmatters.org/betterhearingconsumer/2012/getting-hired-a-hohs-perspective/>

### **3. Networking is even more important.**

Here is another area in which to put extra effort.

Many people in positions of influence have a personal connection. They may have family members or friends who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. They may be Deaf or Hard of Hearing themselves! A teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing wrote:

*"In Victoria, students/adults with hearing loss have had great success in finding employment with two locally based grocery store chains. I frequently find I am being served by ex-students, now in university, when I buy my groceries. While these are starter jobs, they are a first step and are the jobs that 'hearing students' find as their first jobs."*

*I don't know whether these grocery store executives had personal experience with special needs in their lives, or from where their lack of discrimination and proactive actions in hiring has emanated. What I do see is a range of adults with special needs being employed in these stores."*

#### **4. Consider volunteer work experience.**

In *Exploring Careers: Adults with Hearing Loss in the Work Place*, over and over again, adults who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing talked about incorporating their hobbies, interests, and passions successfully in their work lives. Often, they started with volunteer work:

*"My job at the Children's Hospital of Boston is a culmination of all my previous jobs, including volunteer work."*

*"Cara's early volunteer experiences were stepping stones to her current position."*

*"What 'experience' did I get from volunteering? I learned to be prompt and ready to begin my shift, to follow directions and complete tasks, dress appropriately, and deal with diverse individuals. I had a supervisor who could be contacted as a reference to attest to my "experience" when I applied for paying jobs.*

#### **Additional Resources:**

- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Young Adult Network (CHHA YAN) Peer Support Program
  - The aim of the program is to provide ongoing support for Deaf and Hard of Hearing youth between ages 13-18 in their navigation of academic and social lives. Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/CHHAYoungAdults>
- *Exploring Careers: Adults with Hearing Loss in the Work Place* by Claire Blatchford.
  - Available from Clarke Mainstream Services. Alberta Hands & Voices has one copy of this book in the lending library.

- Learning for Life  
<http://www.learning-for-life.ca/>
  - A resource from the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WIDHH) in B.C., this website is a place where Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind people can learn skills and get connected to the world of work.
- *Summer Jobs and Beyond: A Guide for Teens with Hearing Loss and the Adults Who Work with Them* by Claire Blatchford.
  - Available from Clarke Mainstream Services. Alberta Hands & Voices has one copy of this book in the lending library.
- *What Works for Me: Young Adults with Hearing Loss Talk to Teens* by Claire Blatchford.
  - Available from Clarke Mainstream Services. Alberta Hands & Voices has one copy of this book in the lending library.
- The Employment First Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities, Alberta Human Services  
<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/employment-first-internship-program.html>
  - Offers paid internships with Alberta Human Services to attract more people with disabilities into the Alberta Public Service. These internships will provide a rich learning opportunity and invaluable government work experience in a variety of areas.