

Speechreading

Speechreading is the ability to understand what others are saying by taking in all visual cues for understanding. It involves:

- watching the lips, jaw, tongue, and teeth movements of the talker
- watching the facial expressions, which help to identify feelings
- knowing the topic and the vocabulary that goes along with the topic
- body language

Factors that Impact Speechreading

Speechreading is not a complete solution for understanding what people say. The following factors come into play:

- The average speaker makes about 13 speech movements in one second, whereas our eyes can only take in about eight or nine movements in a second.
- Not all sounds are visible; of the 14 we can see, only four of them are very easy to speechread. Approximately 60% of speech sounds are hard to see.
- There are many sounds that look alike on the lips of the speaker. For example, /p/, /b/ and /m/ all involve the same lip movements. That means that the following words look alike: peat, Pete, beat, beet, meat, meet.
- The speaker's lips, teeth, and tongue may not be in clear view. Examples include obstacles in front of the mouth; the face is in shadow; the head is turned away.
- Group discussions with many people talking quickly make it difficult to keep up.

- Some people are difficult to speechread because they don't move their lips very much, or they speak quickly despite reminders to slow down.

Strategies to Help Speechreading

Speechreading does not mean that you try to see every word. What is happening at the time, and any additional knowledge about the situation, can help to fill in the gaps. If your child is struggling to understand, be sure that she knows the topic being discussed. Encourage your child to:

- Focus on the general message rather than each word.
- Keep trying even if the first part of a sentence is missed. The last part may make sense if you wait for the whole sentence. The mind fills in what the eye (and ears) miss.
- Watch the speaker's face, mouth, and body language.

As a speaker, remember to:

- Use natural speech and lip movements. Exaggeration actually makes it harder.
- Slow down slightly. Make sure to say the word endings, rather than let words run together. (In the mirror, silently say and compare "Pleaseded to meetu you." versus "Pleased meecha.")

Your child may have already started speechreading without realizing it. The following activities can be used to improve the natural speechreading skills of *all* children (*everyone* benefits from speechreading skill):

- *Silently sing or say familiar nursery rhymes, commercial jingles, songs, and commonly used phrases or sayings.* You can give a hint, or not - they have to guess the title, topic, or product.
- *Tell a short story or riddle with everyone watching and listening.* Periodically drop your voice or silently say certain words or phrases.

- *Play word games such as hangman or Scrabble.* Write spelling words or key vocabulary words with some missing letters to practice guessing a whole word by seeing only part of it.
- *Point out commonly understood gestures,* such as “Come here,” “Wait a minute,” “Stop.” Identifying gestures can be an entertaining form of charades.

There are some speechreading programs available on DVD. Most of them have adult vocabulary. A program that is appropriate for age 10 years and up is “Sound Ideas.” This DVD was made in Calgary for the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA), and is also available from Deaf & Hear Alberta. Alberta Hands & Voices has one copy of this DVD in its lending library.

<http://www.chha.ca/chha/publications-speechreading.php>