



# Talking About Hearing Loss



When employers show understanding and provide adequate support, people who are deaf or have a hearing loss can thrive in the workplace.



BEING AWARE OF  
HEARING LOSS



KNOW THE SIGNS OF  
HEARING LOSS



TIPS TO COMMUNICATE  
SUCCESSFULLY



NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR  
**Deaf & Hard of Hearing**

# NORMALISING HEARING LOSS

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Hearing loss is often an invisible disability. Many people feel there is a stigma around the condition and hide their hearing loss in both their personal and professional lives. It's therefore vital to create an environment in which employees feel comfortable to be open about their hearing difficulties. This will be increasingly important as the prevalence of hearing loss in the workplace is predicted to double over the next three decades.

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## HOW TO USE THIS MODULE

Use this module to start a conversation with your team about being more aware of hearing loss.

This module covers:

- The signs of hearing loss
- How to talk to an employee about their hearing loss
- How to book a hearing screening or test, and
- Simple tips and strategies for better communication with team members or customers who have a hearing loss.

Once you've completed this module, you're ready to take the Employer General Workplace Assessment.

## MAKE HEARING LOSS PART OF THE EVERYDAY CONVERSATION

Sometimes it's the smallest changes that can have the biggest effect. As an employer, talking respectfully about hearing loss in the workplace is perhaps one of the most effective ways you can increase awareness and create an inclusive work environment.

Employees that have an understanding of the challenges of hearing loss are more likely to appropriately respond to and be more inclusive of team members with this disability. This will help to go some way towards reducing experiences of isolation or anxiety and remove some of the unspoken barriers that can make it difficult for employees with hearing loss to succeed.



**11% of New Zealand's  
workforce have a  
hearing loss**

## WHY TALK ABOUT HEARING LOSS?

If you employ more than 10 employees, there is a high probability that one of your employees could have a hearing loss. Around 11% of New Zealand's workforce have a hearing loss and according to the World Health Organisation this number is predicted to double by 2050.

Being an inclusive workplace that is supportive to individuals with hearing loss, has positive consequences for the wellbeing of employees (and customers) with hearing loss and for the productivity of your organisation.

Talking openly with your team about hearing loss will also help to bring to light any gaps where employees (or customers) with hearing loss could be better supported. As an employer you are required to provide employees with hearing loss the same access to opportunities in the workplace as employees with normal hearing. If employees with hearing loss are not being adequately supported to access equal opportunities, this could be discrimination under New Zealand Law.

Starting a conversation about hearing loss can be a good way to gather information about any workplace stressors that may be negatively impacting on the wellbeing of employees with hearing loss. It is also an opportunity to hear from employees who are worried about noise-induced hearing loss in the workplace. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, employers are legally required to take all practical steps to reasonably ensure the health and safety of their employees. This includes, harm caused by work-related stress and exposure to noise in the workplace.



## SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS

Some employees may not feel comfortable with informing their employer about their hearing loss, and in some cases, they may not be aware of their hearing loss. For this reason, it can be useful to know the signs. Below are some of the common signs that an employee may have a hearing loss:

- They struggle to follow what people say during meetings
- They often ask colleagues to repeat what they say
- They often misunderstand what is being said
- They find it hard to understand speech over the telephone
- They avoid socialising with colleagues
- They often get confused about which direction sound is coming from.

If you notice an employee exhibiting two or more of the above signs it might be a good idea to speak with them confidentially and describe what you've noticed and ask them if they think they may be experiencing any difficulty with their hearing.

## TALKING TO YOUR EMPLOYEES ABOUT HEARING LOSS

If an employee informs you they have a hearing loss, arrange to have a meeting with them at a time and a place they're comfortable with. Remember this is an important opportunity for an employee to discuss their hearing loss and the workplace with you.

Once an employee shares information about their hearing loss with you, it's okay to ask how their hearing loss affects what they can hear, and the effect it's having at work.

It is a good idea to reiterate your organisation's policy for supporting employees with hearing loss, and cover what the next steps are to make sure they get the support they need.

Ask them to complete the Employee General Workplace Assessment and go over this together to identify any adjustments that may need to be made.

Keep the channels of communication open and arrange to have regular check ins with your employee to ensure they are receiving the support and accommodations they need.

## EARLY DETECTION AND INTERVENTION

Research shows that early detection and intervention of hearing loss has a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing, as well as productivity. For this reason, it can be a good idea to encourage all employees to get a hearing check as part of your organisation's health and wellbeing initiatives.

### FREE ONLINE HEARING CHECK

Encourage all employees to take an online hearing check. They will be able to access a free online hearing check via the Employee's Hub or via the Directory on our Hearing Hub website.

### ANNUAL SCREENING

As part of your organisation's membership in the Hearing Accredited Workplace Programme, up to 50 employees will have an opportunity to have their hearing screened by a professional hearing therapist. This is a great way for employees to gain insights into any changes in their hearing.

Book your annual hearing screening dates by emailing us at [linda.homles@nfdhh.org.nz](mailto:linda.homles@nfdhh.org.nz)

### A HEARING LOSS DIAGNOSIS

If a hearing loss is picked up during a screening, employees will be referred to a clinic to have their hearing loss diagnosed. In the Directory, you will find a list of local clinics that employees can choose from.



## COMMUNICATION TIPS

Hearing loss needn't be a barrier to communication. Below are some simple communication tips you and your team can use every day to make communication easier.

- Make sure you have the person's attention before you start speaking.



- Step into the light, so that they can see your face more clearly.



- Check, even if someone's using a hearing aid, if they need to lipread you.



- Stand closer, so that it's easier to hear and so that they can lipread more easily.



- Face them when you speak and don't cover your mouth.



- Speak naturally, slowly and clearly.



- Speak at a normal volume. Shouting can be stressful for both parties.



- Don't waffle and avoid talking without pauses.



- Check in to make sure what you're saying is being understood.



- Be mindful of background noise, which makes it harder to hear.



- If you're talking to one person with hearing loss & one without, focus on both.



- Be aware of speech to text apps. Consider using these in meetings & in noisy environments.



- If someone doesn't understand what you've said, try rephrasing rather than repeating.



- And if all else fails, write down key words.



Remember to be respectful, talk to the person not their disability.

As an employer you can make a difference simply by encouraging employees to make hearing loss aware communication part of business as usual. There are a range of posters, wallet-sized cards and desk-tent cards that can be used as visual cues. These can be ordered directly via the Hearing Hub Shop.



# EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT

## WORK TOGETHER TO FIND THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS

- As you begin the conversation with your employees, it will be important to create a respectful environment, in which talking about the challenges of hearing loss can become part of the everyday conversation.
- As you gather information and your employees share their experiences, try to listen non-judgmentally and hear the issue from your employees perspective.
- Then work together to find a solution that works for you, your employee and the wider team.

The more you can do as an employer to create a supportive environment for employees with hearing loss and assist them to access communication in the workplace, the more likely they are to feel part of a productive and inclusive team, while helping to minimise experiences of stress, isolation and frustration.





**Helping you and your team to become more  
inclusive of hearing loss in the workplace.**



**HEARING ACCREDITED**  
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