

## QUICK START GUIDE: PREPARATION AND PLANNING 1/2

If this is the first time you have offered a Group AR program, there are a number of things you should think about in advance. For example:  
Where should you hold your program?

- How will you let people know about your program?
- How many participants would you like to attend?
- How much, if anything, will you charge for people to attend?
- What topics will you present at the sessions?

It is also important to prepare handouts for each of the sessions in advance. For example, you may want to consider creating handouts for some of the activities and topics.

As you prepare, remember that it is best that the facilitator aim to do no more than 30% of the talking during the sessions. This gives room for the group to share experiences, insights and suggestions on how to cope with issues related to their hearing difficulties.

### Publicize Your Program

It is important to get the word out about your program in your community. Here are a few suggestions.

- Hand out brochures to your patients.
- Post an announcement on a free, online message board like Craigslist.
- Find out if your local community newspaper has a free "community events" calendar. If so, send them information about your program.
- Participate in your area's health care forums and bring brochures to hand out to attendees.
- Find out if there is a Speakers Bureau in your area that has a list of speakers on various topics. Civic organizations are often seeking speakers, and you can offer to speak about hearing loss and treatment at a variety of different venues: elderly centers, libraries, etc. You can inform your audience that you offer group support programs for people with hearing loss.

### Icebreaker Introductions

Regardless of whether you want to do a 2 or 8 session program, it is important for group participants to feel comfortable. You can help create a positive environment by helping participants get to know each other and provide them with some basic ground rules.

One of the most important topics for the first session is getting to know each other. You can assume that for many attendees, this will be their first time at a group support program.

One way to help people become comfortable with each other is to use an Icebreaker exercise. You can begin by having everyone (including you) briefly answer the following questions.

- What is your name?
- Name three places where you have lived?
- What hobbies do you have?
- If you weren't here right now, where would you be?
- If you weren't here right now, where do you wish you could be.

This technique helps everyone get to know each other and find things in common.

**QUICK START GUIDE:**  
PREPARATION AND PLANNING  
2/2

**Ground Rules for Participants**

It is equally important to give group participants guidelines on how they can all contribute to making the program a success. You may want to consider creating a hand-out so that participants can remember the ground rules throughout the program. Some suggestions for ground rules include:

- Get to know others in the group. A friendly interest in other group members may make everyone's group experience more enjoyable.
- Try to learn people's names. And, don't be afraid to ask if you forget. It also helps to have easy-to-see name tags ready for attendees.
- Make sure you are clear about the group's purpose and ground rules.
- Contribute to group discussions. Much can be learned from one another.
- Freely share your thoughts, feelings and experiences. Open up. This will add to the richness of the group.
- Listen carefully to other group members.
- Speak concisely and to the point. Try not to ramble on for too long so that everyone can have a chance to contribute.
- If you find your attention wandering, remind yourself gently that you need to come back to the present.
- If you don't understand something or miss something that is said, please admit it. Everyone in the group may miss something said now and then, so don't feel embarrassed about asking for repetition or clarification.
- Follow the ground rules and encourage others to keep to them. When someone violates a ground rule, gently remind them of the rules.
- Try to go to all the group meetings and do your assigned homework.

*(Adapted from Hunter, D, Bailey, A, & Taylor, B (1995). The Zen of Groups, Tucson AZ: Fisher Books)*

## QUICK START GUIDE:

### SESSION ONE TOPICS

Now that you have prepared for the program, it is time to develop the content and topics for your first session. The primary goal for Session One is to enable the group to express their life experiences with hearing loss and to recognize the sources of their communication challenges.

#### Identify Group Perspectives

Encourage participants to write down 5 to 10 ways (or more) hearing loss affects them and their significant others. Ask attendees to share their perspectives regarding what problems they experience. This activity helps the group warm-up and bond with each other. They should now be aware that they are not the only one experiencing challenges with living with hearing loss.

To make this activity easier, you may want to acquire Sam Trychin's *Living With Hearing Loss: Workbook* (2002), which is available for purchase online.

#### Identify Daily Challenges

After identifying life experiences, you can now work with the group to identify sources of everyday difficulties, encouraging them to be as specific as possible. As group participants identify particular sources for challenges, you can organize them into the following categories: Talker, Listener, Environment, and Message. If possible, you may want to use a white board or chalk board to start categorizing the various challenges.

#### Solicit Group Input

Toward the end of the first session, as time allows, ask the group if there is anything in particular that they would like to learn more about.

Possible topics could be: assistive listening devices, hearing aid expectations, traveling tips, "Why won't he/she wear their hearing aids?", "Why won't he/she get hearing aids?", tinnitus, how the ear works, cochlear implants, etc.

You can provide answers to their questions as time allows, and/or make time to address some of their questions during the second session.

## QUICK START GUIDE: SESSION TWO TOPICS

The main goal of the second session is to acquaint participants with communication strategies that they can use with family members, friends, coworkers and anyone else they interact with in their daily lives.

### Follow-Up On Last Session

You can start the session by addressing questions and interests identified at the first session. You can do this by providing information, Internet resources, brief PowerPoint lectures, etc.

For example, if attendees would like to know more about tinnitus, you might explain the various causes of tinnitus, different treatment options and potential outcomes. You may also want to tell them about useful online references such as the [American Tinnitus Association](#), which offers tips for managing tinnitus, treatment information, frequently-asked questions, tinnitus research, and news and publications regarding tinnitus.

### Communication Strategies

It is important for all participants, including spouses, to learn strategies that will make most of their communication situations much easier.

Many people who do not hear part or all of what a communication partner said to them will respond simply with “huh” or “what was that?” This type of response does not inform the speaker as to why they were not understood.

Speakers often speak too softly, cover their mouths, turn their heads away or speak too quickly, making it difficult for someone with hearing loss to comprehend the words. If a person cannot understand what is spoken, and responds to the speaker by saying, “I didn’t get what you said,” the speaker will remain clueless as to why the other person did not understand what they said.

It is important for the participants to understand that they should explain to the speaker why it was difficult to understand them. By providing these helpful hints in a response, the communication partner can modify their behavior and work towards improving the lines of communication.

You can begin by providing the following examples of helpful and unhelpful responses:

#### Unhelpful Responses:

- What did you say?
- Huh?
- I didn't get what you said.
- Eh?

#### Helpful Responses:

- Could you say that a bit more slowly?
- I didn't understand. It helps if I can see your lips.
- Please speak a little bit louder.
- Please face me when you're speaking.
- I didn't get the last part of what you said.

### It Takes Two to Tango

In your role as the facilitator, make it clear to the group that it takes two to tango! Both people are responsible for improving communication situations. The communication partner is often the principal determinant as to whether communication breakdowns are successfully managed.

Toward the end of Session Two, you may want to offer some general tips to improve communication. These might include:

- If you don't understand, ask for clarification.
- Watch the speaker.
- Place yourself at a good distance, not too close and not too far.
- Be assertive (but not bossy).
- Don't blame people for not speaking clearly. Coach them in a way that will make them happy to accommodate your listening needs.

## QUICK START GUIDE:

### SESSION THREE TOPICS

The third session should continue the focus on communication strategies. Try to use this session to get across these three points: avoid negativity, prepare ahead, and use reminders.

#### Avoid Negativity

Explain that when one is having difficulty understanding a communication partner, one should avoid using negative words such as *can't*, *won't*, *never*, *don't*, etc. When you say something like “Meg, I never understand what you’re saying”, or “You talk too fast for me,” it suggests that the partner is to blame.

Instead, use positive words such as *please*, *thank you*, *would you*, *could you*, *it would help me if I could watch your mouth*, *I need you to speak a bit clearer for me*, *thanks*, etc.

#### Prepare Ahead

Convey to participants that they should employ anticipatory strategies whenever possible, to prevent communication difficulties from occurring in the first place.

Ask each participant to write down one or two upcoming events where they anticipate having communication difficulties. They should then write possible strategies to avoid as much difficulty as possible. Ask the group members to volunteer and share their anticipated difficulties and plans. Once a strategy is offered, also ask the other group members to provide other possible suggestions.

#### Reminders

Persons with hearing loss can help their communication partners by offering reminders when needed. For example, rather than interrupting a friend or spouse to let them know that their voices are too soft and/or too fast, give them a signal code that reminds them to use clear speech. You can ask group participants to provide suggestions for such codes, such as lightly tapping your chin.

## QUICK START GUIDE: SESSION FOUR TOPICS

Now that you have addressed communication strategies, you can build on this foundation and introduce clear speech methods. During the fourth session, it is also a good time to start addressing the social stigmas and feelings associated with hearing loss.

### Stigma Association with Hearing Loss

Feelings regarding stigma are often perceived by those with hearing loss, which potentially can compromise their overall confidence, self-efficacy, and overall quality of life. An article published in 2010 by Margaret Wallhagen (The Stigma of Hearing Loss, *Gerontologist*. 2010 February; 50(1): 66-75) explored different dimensions of stigma experienced by older adults with hearing loss. Wallhagen found that perceived stigma influenced the patient at multiple points on the patient journey. This included the initial acceptance of hearing loss, making the decision to be tested, selecting the type of hearing aid, and deciding when and where hearing aids are worn.

It is important to put the topic of stigma on the table, followed by a group conversation regarding the groups experiences, perceptions, etc.

Two sources to help you prepare for this discussion are:

*Gagné J-P, Southall K, Jennings MB. Stigma and Self-stigma Associated with Acquired Hearing Loss in Adults, Hearing Review. 2011;18(8):16-22.*

*Trychin, S. Living With Hearing Loss: Workbook (Revised), 2008.*

### Clear Speech: Instruction and Practice

Clear speech is a method where the speaker talks slightly slower and louder, uses frequent pauses, and enunciates speech sounds more clearly. It is not exaggerated speech, but rather a style of speaking that is adopted naturally by many talkers in difficult communication situations. For example, clear speech is often used when conversing in noisy or reverberant environments or when speaking to foreigners. One of the keys to living well with hearing loss is for participants to learn how to educate their frequent communication partners about clear speech. Research has indicated that people (including young children) can be taught to produce speech that is much more easily understood by people with hearing loss.

A useful guide for discussion is to provide the group with a brochure (made available by Oticon) titled Communication Is a Two-Way Street

### Handling Difficult Situations

Toward the end of Session 4, you can moderate a discussion on how to plan ahead for traveling with hearing loss, and additionally, how to enjoy dining out at restaurants. Try to incorporate lessons learned during the previous two activities, if possible.

## QUICK START GUIDE: SESSION FIVE TOPICS

You should use this session to invite and motivate participants to research local and national organizations dealing with hearing loss. During the later half of the session, you should continue working with dealing with difficult listening situations.

### Consumer Organizations

Advise participants about consumer organizations and how to contact them. Consumer organizations can provide participants with useful information and act as a continuous resource once the Group AR program ends.

You may need to do a bit of research to identify local and national groups in your area that participants can rely on.

### Suggested Organizations

- Hearing Loss Association of America
- State and city Hearing Loss Associations
- Association of Late-Deafened Adults
- Alexander Graham Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- International Federation of Hard of Hearing People

### Handling Difficult Listening Situations

Many people enjoy going to coffee and/or teahouses, as well as parties, shopping, etc. Additionally, they may use public transportation to visit different venues such as movie theaters, community centers, etc.

Toward the end of Session 5, you can moderate a discussion on how to plan ahead and how to avoid and/or deal with challenges that may occur in different noisy settings. Ask each participant to offer a particular communication situation where they have trouble listening and comprehending speech. Then, you can ask the entire group to suggest potential ways of planning for the situation.

## QUICK START GUIDE: SESSION SIX TOPICS

You can use the sixth session to focus on various types of technology beyond hearing aids and cochlear implants that can help persons with hearing loss improve their quality of life.

### Why do I need more Technology?

Hearing aids and/or cochlear implants help people with hearing loss but there are situations where other types of technology may be useful.

For example, hearing aids do not always work well in adverse situations, such as:

- Listening to someone at a distance
- Listening in a noisy environment
- Listening in a room with reverberation

Some types of Hearing Assistive Technology (HAT) help with difficult listening situations and others are essential for your safety and can protect your hearing.

### What Kind of Hearing Assistive Technology is Available?

Give participants a sense of the assistive technology available at various public locations. Try to use local examples whenever possible, such as an overview of the technology available at the local movie theater.

- Alerting and warning devices can help you hear doorbells, telephones, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors alarms, alarm clocks, etc.
- Telecommunication devices can enable you to be aware of and understand telephone calls more easily.
- Assistive listening devices can enable you to hear what people are saying, e.g., conversations, lectures, television, etc.

### What Types of Assistive Listening Devices are Available?

- Infrared systems are available that can help you hear the television better. They can also help you in large spaces such as halls and movie theaters. With an infrared system, sound from the TV is transmitted using infrared light waves. Watching television with other people can be more enjoyable, since this allows the television to be set to a volume comfortable for other viewers with normal hearing.
- FM radio systems can be described as miniature radio stations that operate on special frequencies. Personal FM systems can be useful in many different situations. They can help you hear in noisy places such as restaurants, as well as enable you to hear lectures, meetings, and group activities with less difficulty. FM systems are used more and more in public spaces such as theaters, places of worship, museums and other community buildings.
- Induction loops and telecoils can help you hear significantly better with your hearing aids and/or cochlear implants at places of worship, performance halls, group meetings, etc. An induction loop system works together with your hearing aid. It will allow you to hear the sounds that are being spoken directly into a particular microphone. Many hearing aids have a particular setting that will allow you to pick up the telecoil signal.
- Hard-wired devices consist of an amplifier and a headset, and may be used by themselves, or connected to your hearing aids or cochlear implants via a personal neck loop. Hard-wired devices include a number of hearing assistive devices such as alarm clocks, fire alarms, listening devices, personal desk top sound systems, etc.

If possible, it is a good idea to have assistive listening devices available for participants to examine. In lieu of trying out the devices, or to add to the discussion, you can use videos to demonstrate the many uses of assistive listening devices. One good video is from the Deaf Action Center in Texas called Solutions for People With Hearing Loss In Career And Educational Environments DVD.

Another helpful way to inform group participants about hearing technology is to provide them with relevant websites, such as:

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Hearing Assistive Technology
- Harris Communications
- Beyond Hearing Aids



## QUICK START GUIDE:

### SESSION SEVEN TOPICS

In this session, you can motivate and enable participants to advocate for themselves and others with hearing loss. At the end of the session, you can also provide participants with useful tips and information regarding emergency preparedness.

#### Advocate for Yourself and Others

The following topics should be discussed with participants:

- What is an advocate and why is advocacy important?
- What are you advocating for?
- At what level and where will the issue(s) be addressed?
  - Local Community
  - City
  - County
  - National
  - International
  - Private business
  - Governmental
  - Agency or Not-For-Profit
- Who will you need to contact?
- What is the best way to communicate with decision makers?
- How can you be confident, firm, and successful with the issue(s) you are addressing to decision makers?

For more information about self-advocacy, please refer to the section on self-advocacy techniques and information inside the resource library.

#### Emergency Preparedness

Dealing with emergency situations, such as floods, fires and earthquakes can be difficult. The challenge can be exacerbated when an individual has a hearing loss. The following topics should be discussed with participants to ensure they are ready to act if an emergency occurs.

- Why is emergency preparedness so important?
  - You and your family could be anywhere when a disaster strikes
  - Emergencies often strike very quickly, without warning
  - It helps to be prepared for emergencies that may occur; this is especially important for people with hearing loss
- What steps do you need to take to be prepared for an emergency?
  - Get informed
  - Make a plan
  - Build a kit
  - Make sure you maintain your plan and kit
- How do you get informed?
  - Think about what hazards might threaten your community, e.g., fires, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, hazardous materials, etc.
  - Find out what community disaster plans are available
- Learn about community warning systems
  - Find out which television stations have emergency alert systems and whether the government has a national weather radio and if so, obtain a pillow vibrator/bed shaker so that you can access the radio if there is a message from the weather radio.
  - Make connections with neighbors and identify at least three people who will contact you in case of an emergency
- Make a plan
  - Talk with family members and friends
  - Find out what escape routes would be best
  - Plan ahead for your pets or service animals
  - Learn about smoke detectors for people with hearing loss, as well as other visual and/or vibrating devices that can alert you to alarms, telephone, doorbell, etc.
  - Store your hearing aids by your bed in a container so that you can access them quickly if there is an emergency. Have appropriate items available, such as batteries, and replace them as needed with newer items
- Maintain your emergency plan and kit
  - Review your plan every six months with friends and family
  - Check your disaster supplies kit every six months and replace any that have expired

## QUICK START GUIDE:

### SESSION EIGHT TOPICS

1/2

During the last session, it is important to provide participants with resources that can help them in the future. At the conclusion of the program, you should consider conducting a program evaluation to help you identify ways to improve your next Group AR program.

#### What Resource are Available?

Provide participants with resources that can help them in the future. Below are some resources on the Internet that participants should consider reading and browsing:

- Hearing Loss Association of America
- Association of Late Deafened Adults
- Association of Medical Professional with Hearing Loss
- Better Hearing Institute

If there are any local or community resources for persons with hearing loss, you should be sure to mention them to the group. You may also want to consider creating a handout with a list of resources.

#### Tips for Getting the Most out of Lipreading

Although some people with hearing loss seem to be experts with lipreading, others often claim that they are not very good with lipreading. Regardless of talent with lipreading or not, almost everyone with hearing loss can benefit in some degree from watching people's lips when they are communicating. Explain some of the ways for participants to get the most out of lipreading, such as:

- Watch the talker's lips and eyes and body language. This may give the lipreader supplemental information to what they are able to hear, plus it may let them become aware of the talker's mood, facial expressions, etc., which in turn may help them understand the talker.
- Make sure the talker is facing any bright light. Otherwise, it may be very difficult for you to discern what is being said because of the glare.
- When possible, try to find out what the topic of conversation is, so that you will have a gist of what is being said.
- Practice your lipreading skills by watching the evening news with the volume turned down.  
Pay close attention to the speaker.
- When you hear a word that does not make sense, think about word's context. For example, you hear: "Who put the blue cows in the bathroom?"
- Identify that the sentence is about a bathroom. That would make it easier to come to the assumption that the talker said: "Who put the blue towels in the bathroom?"

#### Program Evaluation

At the last session, we recommend that you take some time to allow your participants to give you feedback and evaluate the program. This gives participants the opportunity to let you know if they thought the program was helpful, what they liked best about the program and what changes they think would make the program even better. An old adage is that we learn more from criticism than from compliments.

A sample post-program evaluation form can be found on the next page.

**QUICK START GUIDE:**  
SESSION EIGHT TOPICS  
2/2

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many sessions did you attend?
2. Which session or sessions did you find most helpful?
3. Which session or sessions did you find least helpful?
4. Do you have any suggestions on how the sessions can be improved?
5. What was the greatest benefit you received from attending the sessions?
6. Were there any topics that you feel should have been covered but were not?
7. Would you recommend the program to others?