

Awareness training auditory impairment

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Who am I?

First of all, let me introduce myself: my name is Renée Iseli–Smits, I am 54 years old and have a heavy hearing impairment in both ears. Born fully-hearing, as a child I had colds and middle ear infections with great regularity until I was 16 years old.

A year or two later, the ENT doctor spoke to me for the first time about a hearing aid. Shaken, I immediately said that this was not necessary.

In reality, I thought "Are you kidding? The boys won't look at me anymore!" but was raised too politely to say this out loud.

Since I wanted to study History and still had my doubts about whether I would be able to understand enough during the lectures, I finally changed my mind and got my first in-the-ear hearing aid.

About 10 years later, a hearing aid followed on the other side, because "the left ear is almost as bad as the right one". Over the years my hearing became worse and worse, partly due to a "hearing infarction" in 2007. After that I was officially "hard of hearing" and I was obliged to progress to behind-the-ear hearing aids, of which I had once sworn "never", because in-the-ear hearing aids were no longer strong enough for me.

I successfully completed studies in History, with an unforgettable exchange year at the RUHR-Universität in Bochum, Germany. Fortunately, before my hearing faded, I had been able to learn a number of foreign languages, which have always been of great use to me. After my studies I worked in various professions, including as an employment consultant and job coach for people with hearing impairments at reintegration agency Werkpad.

In 2001 I met my Swiss husband, we married and in 2009 we moved to Switzerland. For me this was a huge challenge, not only because of re-shaping my (working) life, but also because of the

language. I tried to establish many social contacts and to actively immerse myself in the world of hearing-impaired people. With that, I was able to kill two birds with one stone: getting to know new people and the new language and learning more about the world of auditory impaired people in Switzerland.

I started writing a blog about my experiences with a hearing impairment ("I'm hard of hearing, so what?" - [https://hardofhearingweb.word\),press.com/](https://hardofhearingweb.word),press.com/)) in both German and Dutch, I regularly write columns for German magazines and have created Facebook groups in Dutch, German and English for people with hearing impairments.

For the last year or two I have been active as a moderator for ProCap Schweiz, a Swiss organization for and with people with disabilities, and I give awareness workshops to both people in service professions as well in schools. I also like to share experiences about daily life with a hearing impairment.



Why this training?

You have chosen this training, but why did I develop this?

I use a large part of this training in my awareness workshops.

Because written training is different in design, I have converted the workshop into a handy written format, in the hope that as many people as possible can benefit from this.

Both people with a hearing impairment and their fully-hearing fellow human beings are often unsure how to bring up the topic of hearing impairment, or how they have to deal with a hearing impairment.

My workshops have clearly shown that hearing people can be afraid of doing or saying something wrong, and often do not know how best to approach someone with an auditory impairment. They often struggle with the question: what should/shouldn't I say?

Auditory-impaired people are often unaware of these questions in their hearing fellow humans and only experience the unfamiliarity, ignorance and impatience of the hearing people, while they themselves play a major role in changing this.

Main goal of this training is, therefore, to help people with a hearing impairment to make their hearing family, friends and colleagues more aware of what life with a hearing impairment involves, and how hearing people can deal with this as well as possible.

Another goal of the training is to make people with a hearing impairment more self-aware. That is to say, with this training it also becomes clear to them that good communication only arises by being open about your auditory impairment and also by being clear in what you need for better communication. The latter requires courage, insight into your own auditory impairment and the desire to deal with this as well as possible.

For whom is this training, and how can I conduct it?

This training is mainly intended as a tool for anyone who wants to give hearing people more insight into daily life with an auditory impairment.

People with hearing impairments can use this training to make their hearing family, friends, colleagues more aware of their impairment, but it is also useful for professionals who work with people with a hearing impairment and want to raise awareness of the hearing people in the lives of their clients.

Finally, this training is also recommended for hearing people who have a general interest in hearing impairment.

This training can be done with 1 or more people, but I would advise not exceeding a maximum of 10 participants.

A quiet environment is important for this training. For example, at home with a partner, family or relatives, or in a meeting room at work.

Since the training takes between an hour and an hour and a half, it would be useful to inform participants well in advance, so that they can free up that time without stress.

And don't forget to inject some humour into it; it can be fun!

1) Start of the training

Start the training with questions to the participants.

Possible questions in a corporate context could be:

Who has experience with people with a hearing impairment?

Think of work and/or leisure situations (family/friends) involving hearing impairments.

What first comes to mind when you think of a hearing impairment?

Are there any questions you'd like to ask, or is there anything you'd like to know from me before we start?

What would you like to learn in this training?

Possible questions in a non-corporate context could be:

What first comes to mind when you think of a hearing impairment?

Are there any urgent questions you'd like to ask, or is there anything you'd like to know from me before we start?

What would you like to learn in this training?

It is important that in this phase you gain some insight into the needs of the participants. Write down their questions and come back to them later in the training, possibly with practical examples.

EXAMPLE: two family members ask why someone often withdraws from family gatherings or goes home early. They find that unsociable.

You can come back to this later on with the theme of hearing tiredness and tell them that the person needs listening breaks, or that listening is so tiring that they need to stop sooner.

Tell them this factually, not emotionally.

2) Introductory theory

An auditory impairment is an invisible impairment. Where wearing glasses has long been accepted in society, wearing hearing aids often still has a negative image and is often connected to misunderstandings and even taboos, such as, for example: only older people wear hearing aids and it is best to keep your hearing aid as invisible as possible. Especially with older people, it can take an average of 7 years before taking the step of purchasing hearing aids.

I myself always start my workshop theory with the opening sentence:

"There is not just one auditory impairment, but there are as many different auditory impairments as there are people."

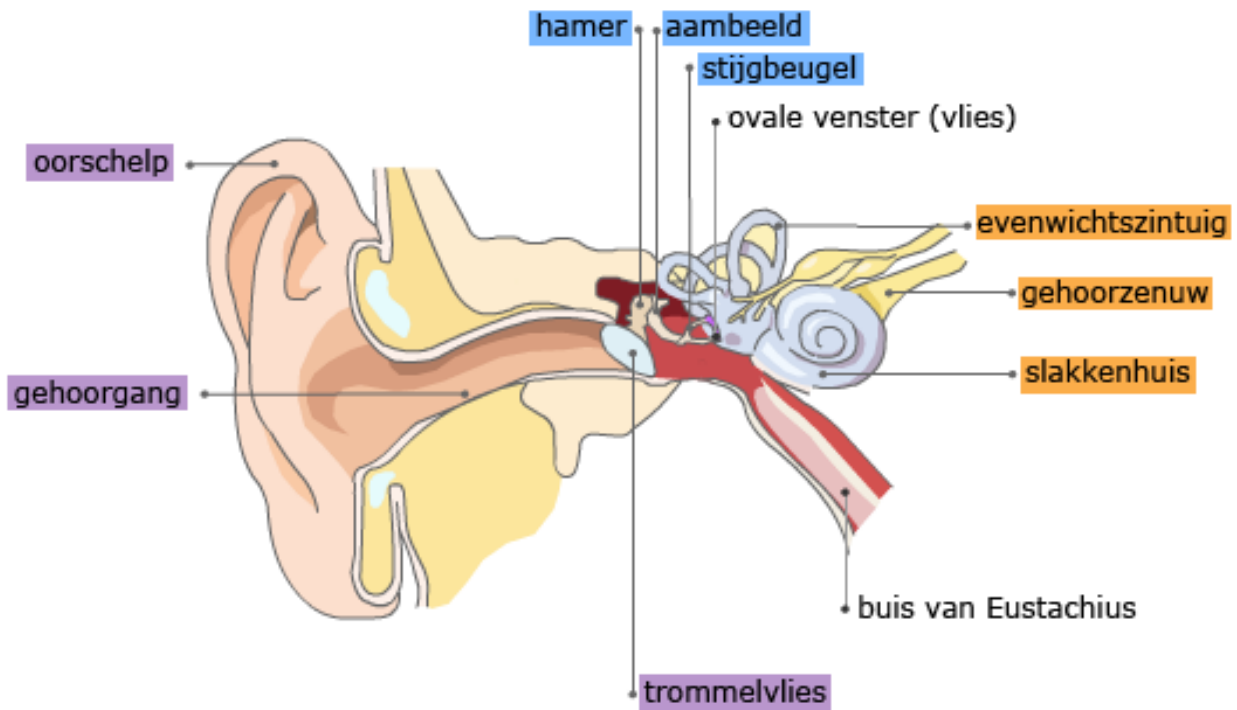
In other words, a hearing impairment is individual and different for all concerned.

Nevertheless, there are five distinct groups:

1. **Normal hearing <20 dB:** mild hearing loss without communication problem.
2. **Mild hearing loss =21-30 dB:** Soft sounds are heard less well and the person concerned may have difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments.
3. **Moderate hearing loss = 41-60:** relatively soft sounds are no longer heard and the person concerned has difficulty understanding speech in case of background noise
4. **Severe hearing loss = 61-90 dB:** The human voice is only heard from a very short distance or when speaking loudly. Group conversations are almost impossible to follow.

5. **Profound hearing loss = more than 90 Db:** Affected people can only hear very loud sounds and communication is impossible without hearing aids.

Schematic cross-section and explanation of the hearing organ



- Uitwendige oor: oorschelp, gehoorgang en trommelvlies
- Middenoor: holte met 3 gehoorbeentjes
- Binnenoor: slakkenhuis met zintuigcellen.

Auricle: External part of the hearing, helps to absorb the sound vibrations.

Ear canal: The way from auricle to eardrum.

Hammer: Auditory bone that transmits the vibration from eardrum to anvil.

Anvil: Auditory bone that transmits the vibration from hammer to stirrup.

Stirrup: Auditory bone that transmits the vibration from stirrup to membrane.

Oval venster: Membrane between middle ear and inner ear.

Balance sense: Sense that lies just next to the ear and perceives the direction of movements .

Auditory nerve: Transmits impulses to the cerebrum.

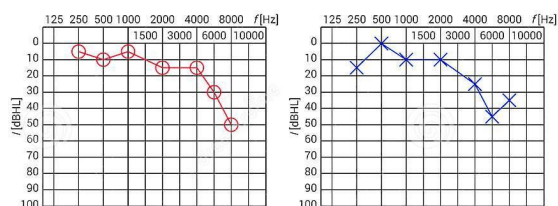
Cochlea: Filled with liquid and cilia. The zintuig cells transmit impulses to the auditory nerve.

Eustachian Tube: Connection between ear and pharynx, through which the pressure in the middle ear remains similar to the external ear.

Eardrum: Membrane on the border between external ear and middle ear, which transmits the vibration to the hammer.

How is a hearing impairment measured?

Via an ENT doctor or at an audiological centre in a soundproof cabin, or with a hearing care professional.



The horizontal axis (x-axis) represents **frequency (pitch)** from lowest to highest. The lowest frequency tested is usually 250 Hertz (Hz), and the highest is usually 8000 Hz. You can think of the frequency axis like the keys on a piano where the sounds become higher pitched as you progress from left to right. Most speech falls into the [250 to 6000 Hz range](#), with the vowel sounds among the lowest frequencies and the consonants such as S, F, SH, CH, H, TH, T and K sounds among the highest frequencies.

The vertical axis (y-axis) of the audiogram represents the **intensity (loudness)** of sound in [decibels](#) (dB), with the lowest levels at the top of the graph. Although the top left of the chart is labeled -10 dB or 0 dB, that does not mean the absence of sound. Zero decibels actually represents the softest level of sound that the average

person with normal hearing will hear, for any given frequency. (It's actually a normative curve that has been straightened out!)

Points in audiogram

So each point in an audiogram emits a different sound. Point z in the audiogram above shows a soft sound with a low frequency (30 dB, 250 Hz) and point f a soft sound with a high frequency (30 dB, 4000 Hz). At the bottom of the middle of the 'banana' you are an icon of a human head. That point emits a loud sound of a frequency in the middle of the speech area (60 dB, 1000 Hz).

Hearing thresholds

The softest sounds a person can hear at different frequencies are noted in the audiogram. This softest sound is called the hearing threshold. Hearing thresholds of 20 dB or better are considered normal. The size of the average hearing loss at 500, 1000 and 2000 Hz is often used to characterize the hearing loss.

This theory is to support hearing loss globally and can be used in whole or in part but is not compelling.

You can also choose to tell something about your own experiences here, but be aware of the following:

- Make sure it doesn't become a "complaint story"! You want to convey information to the participant(s) without seeming negative.
- Think in advance about what exactly you want to tell the participants, what is important for them to know. Also write this down for yourself so as not to lose the thread in your approach..
- Alternatively, you can also use a small part of the theory above and combine it with some personal experiences.

- Always try to build in some humorous examples!

In some cases, it may be better to focus more on a practical interpretation of the training.

You can also choose to bring some tools, show them and explain how they work for you.

You can also let the participants hear what "hearing loss" sounds like:

<https://www.hear-it.org/Impressions-of-hearing-loss-and-Tinnitus->

3) Practical exercises

In this part of the training you can express your own creativity! The main instrument here is tight-fitting EARPLUGS, possibly supplemented with hearing protection headphones. There are various versions of these available, at different prices. If you cannot/do not want to spend money on these, then it is advisable to see if headphones can perhaps be borrowed from a hearing care professional or from another source.

Tips and advice for the exercises:

1. Call the practical exercise by its name “practical exercise” and not, for example, "Role play"! This may put off some participants.
2. Keep the exercises simple and specific. Give clear instructions to the participant(s) and check if they have understood the assignment/exercise.
3. Only take real examples from the practice of the participant(s). With colleagues, for example, take a simple daily work situation and, in the case of partner/family/family, an example from daily life. If you don't do this, the exercises will not be relevant to the participant(s) and therefore will not work.
4. Always explain the exercises to the participant(s) first, before they get started.
5. If the earbuds are in and possibly the headphones are on, check what the participant hears. Sometimes they hear too much for the exercise and the earplugs need to be inserted differently.
6. Clearly indicate when the exercise begins and ends. If there are several participants, involve them in the exercise by, for example, having them observe closely one of the “actors” and afterwards have them give their observations.

If you have enough time and the participant(s) are motivated, you can have the participants to exchange roles.

7. The exercises can be carried out both indoors and outdoors. Inside, a little more imagination is needed to portray a situation, so think carefully in advance how and where you want to do this.

Outside, for example, you can take the participant(s) on a journey to experience what it is like to travel with a hearing impairment. If there are several participants, you could put them into pairs and give each person a role, for instance with one of them being fully-hearing and the other mimicking hearing impairment, with an assignment involving creating a conversation on a certain theme. Keep it simple and use themes like vacation, leisure, travel or something similar.

Or take participant(s) to a restaurant/pub and let them experience this visit, with one of them playing the fully-hearing role and the other the hearing-impaired role (using earplugs)..

Two sample exercises:

- 1) At work, you regularly notice that colleagues become irritated by having to repeat what they say to you. Include this in your exercise, for example:

Some participants are in a meeting. The participant who is playing the hearing-impaired role with earplugs often asks for repetition. Alternate the participant(s) with earplugs if necessary, so that several participants experience this.

- 2) Your partner/family often calls you from another room or walks away whilst talking to you. Let them put in earplugs so that they hear less and let them experience through the exercise what this is like for you.

4) Tips and facts based on the practical exercises

- When you are done with the practical exercises, you want to know how the participant(s) experienced the exercises. Ask them.
- Ask the participants themselves if they have ideas about what went well in the communication or what can be improved.
- Let all observers talk about their observations.
- Then first tell them what you have noticed positively, for example, a participant used extra gestures or mimicry for better communication, or wrote something down in a difficult situation. Name everything you found positive in the exercises.
- Then name what else you noticed and give practical tips, or tell something about your own experiences. Don't forget the humour.
- Answer any questions.
- After that, it's a good time to name the 10 most important rules for dealing with people with hearing impairments.

The 10 most important rules for dealing with people with a hearing impairment:

1. Always make sure you make eye contact before you start a conversation. Eye contact is extremely important for lipreading and/or facial expressions.
2. Make sure that your face is clearly visible: good exposure and no backlighting.
3. Before you start a conversation, get someone's attention.
4. Never approach someone from behind but always from the front. This not only because of eye contact, but also to avoid startling someone who does not hear you coming.
5. Talk calmly, clearly and use facial expressions and gestures.

6. When talking, do not talk very loudly or shout because this can distort the sound, especially in hearing aids, and often does not promote clarity.
7. Use short, simple phrases. Please note: definitely no childish language, but no long sentences or difficult words.
8. If you have to repeat yourself several times, do this two or three times. After that, try different words. It is possible that another word is easier to understand.
9. If you need to explain or point out something, for example when asked about the way, explain first and then point it out. An auditory limited person usually depends on lip reading and cannot lip read and look at something else at the same time.
10. Do not communicate with a hearing impaired person from behind a computer/laptop, because that way you can't keep eye contact.

Be aware when giving tips and advice, that you can indicate what works for you, but also make it clear that every situation for every person with a hearing impairment will differ. And, of course: don't forget the humor!

5) A few more practical exercises

After this second piece of theory, there is usually still time for a second short practical exercise. You can choose to do the same exercise again, with the clear instruction this time to apply the theory in practice.

To keep their attention, it is often better to let the participant(s) do a new exercise. You can choose a theme yourself or let the participants choose a theme. With the latter, make sure that choosing does not take too long or become chaotic.

6) Finalisation, summary and evaluation

- To complete the training, it is important to briefly summarize what you have done so far. You can prepare this summary in advance for a large part.
If you are preparing this, don't forget to include the input of the participant(s) in your final summary!
- Build in one last round of questions and answer the questions that are still there or are unanswered.
- Ask the participant(s) for an evaluation of your training. What did they find positive, what can be improved and what will they take with them from the training.
- You can do this via an evaluation form or in a looser, more spontaneous way. Most importantly, you get feedback. At least you know how your training was received and if you repeat the training some other time, you also know what works or what you still have to improve.
- Write down your own experience of the training for yourself. What was it like to prepare and deliver this training? What were the reactions of the participant(s)? What would you do better/differently next time and what would you skip?

Finally ...

Finally, to end this training, the following:

- With this training I have tried to promote openness and remove uncertainties.
- The training can be carried out by everyone and can be adapted to all situations and needs.
- Because I think it is important that as many hearing people as possible become aware of what it is like to live with a hearing impairment, I have decided to offer this training free of charge.
- If you have any questions, comments or would like more information, please feel free to contact me. I am open to improvements and feedback. My email address is ikbenslechthorend@outlook.de