

# HOW?

## Understanding and using a hearing loop system effectively

This guide is aimed at those who are using a loop system for the first time, whether it is a large building where several rooms have been looped with cable or a domestic loop amplifier, which is moved from room to room as required.

To maximise the benefit of the loop system for hearing impaired people, there are at least three areas to be considered:

1. The hearing aid user
2. The loop system,
3. Communication tactics with the loop system

### The hearing aid user

Most hearing aids will have three switch positions: O, M & T.

- O is off
- M is microphone – for use without the loop system
- T is telecoil – for use with a loop system

It is important that people wishing to use the loop are advised to sit inside the loop cable and to switch their aid to T. Elderly people may need help, through loss of dexterity, with the tiny hearing aid switch. It is better not to adjust the hearing aid volume until after the loop has been adjusted to suit the majority of hearing aid users – and then finer adjustments can be made to individual hearing aids. There are many different kinds of loop systems that the hearing aid with a 'T' switch might be used with. However, not all "private" hearing aids have a 'T' switch and may not benefit from a particular loop system. Loop systems are likely to be widely in use by 2004 when access to services under the Disability Discrimination Act becomes mandatory.

### The loop system

What is a loop system? Quite simply, it is an electrical system designed to amplify and clarify the sound of the speaker's voice for users who

sit inside of the loop of cable. Sound received through the hearing aid microphone is likely to be distorted if it is turned to 'M', whereas sound received through the hearing aid on 'T', via the "magnetic" signal transmitted through the loop cable, is likely to be clearer and with less background noise for most people – though this may not necessarily be an improvement for everyone.

Most loop systems have a number of controls on the front and back. If the loop is being provided for one person only, then it may be worth tuning in each control to suit that individual person, but in a group situation the considerations may be different. It is a fact that "hearing loss" is very individual, with frequency losses varying from person to person. Therefore, with the exception of the volume control, half way setting for all the other controls might be more likely to reach an acceptable compromise for most people.

It is essential that the loop system is set up and tested before the talk itself begins. Once the talk has started, people may not wish to be seen disrupting the speakers talk, and instead may choose to remain excluded from the content of the talk – which should not be regarded as an acceptable option by the organisers.

Setting the level of volume requires several hearing aid users in order to find a consensus about what adjustments are likely to suit most people. After the talk, feedback from as many loop-users as possible should enable improvements for the next meeting. The ideal volume control setting may vary from room to room or building to building. If feedback indicated that there is a more popular volume position - then it may be worth making a permanent mark on the loop amplifier of that position as a starting point for any future adjustments.

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Set the loop volume to most people's satisfaction before they begin to adjust their own hearing aid volume control.

## **Communication tactics with the loop system**

If possible, loop the area as near to the speaker as possible. In this way, people will follow the speaker more easily because they can use what they "see" to support what they "hear". Many people lip-read without realising it.

Have a name or board available for the speaker to write up anything specialised such as numbers, names and each new subject heading - and ask the speaker, beforehand, to do so.

Ask the speaker to keep as still as possible, and to slow down their speech.

It is essential that the speaker repeats any comments or questions that come from the audience before he or she responds to them. If not, hearing aid users with their hearing aids on 'T' may be automatically cut off from hearing what the person is saying, even if they are beside them, and will not be able to make sense of an "answer" if they have not heard and understood the question!

## **Other types of help**

An overhead projector or multimedia projector can be used if the speaker has prepared acetates or their presentation using PowerPoint presentation software. This can take a lot of pressure out of trying to follow a speaker's words

Palantype or Speedtext operators can be hired from the RNID to provide in screen text as the speaker talks.

Lip speakers can be hired. They repeat the speaker's words – clearly and without sound – to people who are fairly confident lip readers

## **Please remember**

Just because hearing impaired people may not complain when they are left out, it does not mean they are not hurt or upset. To be repeatedly excluded from conversations and activities, because of hearing loss, may result in that person resigning themselves to partial isolation as a

defence against further hurt or embarrassment. The inaccessibility of these conversations and activities will often lead to severe loss of confidence and self-esteem. In society as a whole it is vital that people recognise the often tragic consequences of "exclusion" in terms of "quality of life" of many people with a hearing loss who may be misunderstood to be unintelligent or stupid.

*Written by Bill Allen, Independent tutor of lip-reading to adults and deaf awareness trainer. Bill runs various free courses across the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales.*



## **Who are we?**

*High Peak CVS works to ensure that local voluntary and community groups can access as much support, advice and information as possible. We help groups in many different areas, such as funding, charity registration, practical services including printing, training and links to training and with legal issues. We have resources, including a meeting room, computers and OHP for use by groups.*

**To find out how we can help you, please contact us on 01663 735 350 or email [hello@highpeakcvs.org.uk](mailto:hello@highpeakcvs.org.uk). Visit us at [www.highpeakcvs.org.uk](http://www.highpeakcvs.org.uk)**