

Communicating with people with hearing loss on the phone

Some people with hearing loss may have difficulty using the phone. Not everyone has phone amplifiers or uses relay services. Use the following tips to ensure the caller gets the information they need.

1. Do not eat or chew gum while on a call.
2. Speak directly into the phone mouthpiece or microphone.
3. Speak clearly. Enunciate your words. Do not mumble.
4. Speak at a normal pace – not too fast and not too slow.
5. Do not shout.
6. Avoid acronyms or jargon.
7. Break down words or numbers that are difficult to understand. See the next page for examples.
8. Introduce one idea or question at a time.
9. Rephrase your message if the person does not understand you.
10. If the person is having difficulty understanding you, ask, “What can I do to help you hear me or understand me better?”

Above all, remain patient and flexible!

Relay calls

Some people with hearing loss use relay services to make phone calls. There are several types of relay services, but they all have these things in common:

- The call is from a person who needs information or services.
- A communications assistant (CA) facilitates the conversation.
- The conversation is confidential.

Some people hang up on relay calls because they do not understand what a relay call is or how it works. **Do NOT hang up.**

Recognizing a relay call

With some relay services, you hear the following announcement when you answer the phone: “Hello, a person is calling you through Minnesota Relay. This is CA number 1234. Have you received a relay call before?”

- If you **are not familiar with relay**, say “NO” and the CA will explain how relay works. If you have any questions, ask them.
- If you are familiar with relay, say “YES” and the call will begin.

With other relay services, there is no announcement. You may not even realize that the person calling is using a relay service.

You might notice there are longer pauses between when you speak and when the caller responds. This is because the CA is communicating what you said to the caller and is waiting for the caller to respond. Please wait for the response.

Persons with a speech disability may also use a relay service. They can hear you, and may speak to you, but the CA repeats what they say so that you can understand them.

Relay quick tips

- If you heard a relay announcement at the beginning of the call, say “Go Ahead” or “GA” each time you have finished speaking and are ready for a response. When you hear the CA say “GA,” it is your turn to speak again. This ensures you do not respond at the same time and miss each other’s communication.
- Speak directly to the person calling, not the Communications Assistant (CA). Pretend the CA is not on the call. The CA is not part of the conversation and will not acknowledge you if you speak to him/her.
- If you need to ask the caller a series of questions, ask them one at a time, wait for a response, and then ask the next question. This gives the caller a chance to respond to each question and reduces misunderstandings.

Break down words and numbers

Numbers may be more easily understood as individual digits. For example, for 1,435 try saying “one-four-three-five.”

Here are examples of multi-syllable words and the NATO phonetic alphabet to use to clarify any letters the caller is having difficulty understanding. For example, “A as in airplane.”

Letter	Clarifying words	NATO phonetic alphabet
A	airplane, apple	Alpha
B	balloon, butterfly	Bravo
C	caterpillar, cupcake	Charlie
D	donut, dragon	Delta
E	eagle, elephant	Echo
F	flower, funny	Foxtrot
G	grateful, garden	Golf
H	hammer, hippopotamus	Hotel
I	ice cream, illusion	India
J	jellyfish, jumping jacks	Juliet
K	kangaroo, koala	Kilo
L	ladybug, letter	Lima
M	motorcycle, Minnesota	Mike
N	Nancy, nightlight	November
O	octopus, orange	Oscar
P	popcorn, purple	Papa
Q	qualify, question	Quebec
R	rabbit, rainbow	Romeo
S	soap opera, sunshine	Sierra
T	telephone, turtle	Tango
U	umbrella, unicorn	Uniform
V	victory, volcano	Victor
W	water, wonderful	Whiskey
X	x-ray	X-ray
Y	yellow, yo-yo	Yankee
Z	zebra, zigzag	Zulu

