

GUESS WHO IS COMING TO DINNER?

Mary Clark

We are going to use role-playing in this workshop. Our first skit portrays a husband and a wife going to a restaurant. Linda is playing the hearing wife and Steve is the deaf husband. Mark is going to be our waiter.

Linda: Happy Anniversary, sweetie --

Steve: How was your day?

Waiter: Are you ready to eat, can I take your order?

Linda: (repeating to Steve) Are you ready to order? We didn't see the menu yet.

Waiter: do you want me to come back? I will give you a few more minutes.

Linda: a couple of more minutes --

Waiter: Are you ready to eat? Can I take your order?

Wife: I think I will have the Lobster Newburg -- (signing)

Waiter: What does he want?

Wife: You can ask him. What do you want?

Waiter: What do you want? (Shouting)

Wife: Why were you yelling at him? He's deaf, but you don't need to yell. Husband: (indicating)

Waiter: Anything else?

Wife: Anything else?

Husband: (signing -- indicating)

Waiter: what does that mean?

Husband: (signing to waiter)

Waiter: What is he doing?

Wife: How much?

Waiter: well, it's \$4 dollars.

Mary Clark: What were some of the communications we saw between the husband and the wife in the restaurant?

Female Attendee: The husband was depending on the wife to interpret.

Mary Clark: Right.

Female Attendee: The waiter was looking at the wife and ignoring the husband, like he wasn't there.

Mary Clark: Yeah, the waiter was looking at the wife and not looking at the deaf person.

Female Attendee: You know, he kept over exaggerating his mouth movements. He didn't really need to do that. He could have resorted to writing back and forth on paper.

Mary Clark: Okay, what I would like to do now is ask the panel members how you resolve some of those issues that we talked about.

Linda: Perhaps I should have explained more to the waiter that my husband is deaf. I should be able to say that to the waiter. I should have explained to the waiter, when he started yelling at my husband that he didn't need to yell. I should have explained to him that he could order for himself.

Steve: Most of the time I eat out by myself. So it is not an issue. I have a tendency to depend on the hearing person who is there to interpret for me. I look at the waiter first, and if I don't understand, I look at the hearing person who is with me. I know it is wrong. I should deal with the situation myself either ask my date, wife, to interpret first or to try to deal with the whole situation myself with the waiters while ordering without depending on a hearing person with me. I need to make that kind of communication agreement with the person first before we go out or while we are at the table.

Female Attendee: I have started to speak up for myself and tell the waitress, I am deaf and that I need to see her face, and if she has any specials I would appreciate that they being written down. Also, if they do shout at me, I tell them I cannot hear and thank them for their effort and then gently say to them, "I appreciate your trying to help me hear you, but it would be so much better if you would either write it down or if you would speak softer. That gives them a positive attitude, especially if you follow it up with a big smile.

Mark: Since I became deaf, I have had a variety of experiences going out to eat in restaurants. And you know, like Steve, I'm guilty of depending on my date once in a while. The experience of the waitress or waiter with a deaf person varies. If they have served deaf people before, they may have an idea of what your needs are, but if they have never seen a deaf person before and you show up at their table and you don't tell them what your needs are, they get really, really confused. Often I have told people I'm deaf, and then they'll move closer to talk loudly into my ear. I need to explain to them, I can't hear anything. I need to have a piece of paper ready to offer them and tell them, please write on that so I will know what today's specials are. I cannot depend on them to figure it out. I really don't like it when I go into restaurants with a hearing date and they start taking care of me. I know I will sometimes depend on them for interpretation, but sometimes they don't ask me first and they start interpreting for me and ordering for me. You need to take control of the situation for yourself, first and foremost making the hearing person comfortable with you and then they are more open to finding out what your needs are.

From the floor: I am hard of hearing, and when I go into a restaurant there is often a light in the middle of the table. And it is so hard to lip-read the waiter with this very low light. If that doesn't work, I might have to move the light around. If that doesn't work, then I'll resort to writing.

From the floor: I find if I go with my family, and I'm the only hearing-impaired person there, I can't get the attention of the waiter. They will insist on looking at someone in my family and explaining as though I was not there. If I go with a group of deaf friends, we're all hard of hearing, then I find that they are very helpful and they will write down the specials and will do things for you.

Mary Clark: We as deaf people have to speak up and be assertive. So I think it is a two-way thing. It is not all the responsibility of the restaurant, but the person who is deaf, too.

Skit number two is a family union holiday dinner. Mark is the deafened person and the other three of you are the family members.

Jeanne: This is a family reunion. Usually everybody is talking at the same time. The hearing people tend to band. So, we are all having a wonderful time. Oh, we're going to tell mark something, we're going to have to tell mark -- Steve, you tell mark.

Steve: (indicating, exaggerating)

Jeanne: We're going to just have the best time.

Linda: What are you doing?

Mark: Reading.

Mary: What did you see in this skit?

Female Attendee: No one was signing and Mark should be more assertive in asking what was going on.

Mary: What else?

Female Attendee: People covered their faces while talking.

Mary: How do you resolve some of these issues yourselves?

Jeanne: I have a real hard time with this. I miss holidays, and I miss being an easy part of things. Someone has a good joke and by the time they repeat it, they have lost the enthusiasm and you are waiting for the punch line and it doesn't sound funny the second or third time. My eldest daughter helps me, I will touch her, she will rephrase what is being said in a very courteous way.

“Isn't this funny what so and so said?” So it is not talking down to me. It is talking to me and letting everyone else know what she is repeating to me. Maybe I won't have the opportunity to laugh as hard but I will feel the inclusion. So having someone set up like that beforehand is immensely helpful as is bringing your own pad of paper to perhaps write key words on, that helps. Or you can divide a piece of paper and one side is for topic, and the other side of the paper is for change of topic so even if I can't keep up with everyone I know what is being talked about. Another thing I have learned the hard way is to concentrate on one to one conversations. I have had more beautiful conversations one on one than the group was having because the groups tend to be superficial and keep things general. I would encourage you with the holidays coming up to try that.

Steve: I don't do holidays very well at all. 30 years I have been deaf and I still can't handle holidays. But I have to say I am lucky that my parents and four brothers, all have taken at least one sign language class in the past 25 years. The problem is that at this time none of them are fluent enough to carry on regular conversations using sign language. They can probably one on one short and sweet sentences if they want to, but they all have a preference for talking instead of signing. I live 1500 miles away, and only see them two or three times a year. So that it makes it more difficult, as they can't really maintain their sign language skills. I have three young nieces, age 8 to 12. They have become interested in learning sign language. And they can fingerspell most of the words they want to say. But what it amounts to is that you have a 50-year-old Uncle sitting at the kid's table for the holidays instead of sitting with the rest of the adults because I am more comfortable trying to sign with the three young kids. But I guess that is preferable to eating very

fast and then drifting off to find the TV and watch the football games. I don't handle it very well at all.

Linda: Family reunions or family gatherings are very difficult for all of us. I don't have the perfect solution. Usually we stay at the table for hours and hours and eat and talk. I usually eat fast and get up and I start clearing off the table and start washing the dishes. But one holiday I said to myself I am not going to do that no more. I am going sit at this table. Usually what I do is try to bring a deaf friend with me, someone that I can sign with, or maybe bring a friend who is an interpreter who has signing skills.

Mark: This is one situation I have never been able to resolve in my family. I grew up in a large French Canadian family and there was a lot of noise and conversation during meals. The whole family had dinner together every night of the week and we are very competitive. And we weren't concerned with what we were talking about as much as who was talking the loudest. We all tried to win by being the one who got the last word in. Years later when I started losing my hearing and progressed from being hard of hearing to profoundly deaf, family get togethers at the holidays got more and more difficult for me because my family had not changed. It was all one big free for all. So I came to the table at the holidays with my pad and pen and let them know I really can't hear; please write for me once in a while. One of my oldest sisters would write: "George and Pete are talking about cars." That's the most I would get, and then she would get into the conversation, and then I wouldn't get any more. And I started feeling like I wasn't even there. The last Christmas I had with my family was the last straw. I had this funny story that happened when I was in the navy. We were having dinner with my sister Alice and her fiancé, on Christmas Day and I am sitting there and my paper and pen is not being used. And my sister is telling a story and all of a sudden my future brother-in-law is laughing and my brother Pete wrote Kerry just told Bob your story from the Navy. So since then I have had most of my holidays with friends that are hard of hearing or deaf. Whether they sign or not, it doesn't matter. These are the people that care about my needs and me. There is no need to try to change my family. I have changed and I am accepting that as a status quo.

Jeanne: Another idea comes from something Mary once told me. She had the idea of a talking stick. The only person who could be speaking would be the one with the stick. Also on a camping

trip could no longer see at the campfire, so they held up flashlights. She and I have also gone to some very nice restaurants that have low table light. We asked for extra candles at the table. It is really beautiful but it takes a little courage. It is like riding a bike. It gets easier every time you do it.

From the Floor: I am hard of hearing. Have you ever noticed that when you are in a social gathering, there tends to be one person who talks the most? So I came up with this idea. I use FM systems, and I give that primary person the mike. And that way it is a lot easier to follow some of the conversation.

From the Floor: I am still really struggling with this issue. There are so many hurts inside of us. For our last gathering, I made a videotape and I sent it to everybody and told them I wanted them to learn the abc's. And I went home six months later and they were all talking. I stopped my family members at this gathering, and I said, "Wait a minute, I love you all and I can't understand one word you are saying. And it makes me feel very sad." It just ruined the day. You could just see the party break up. My mom said she was going home. Because I think they all felt so guilty about it. So have not gone back for a family gathering for over a year now. And what I'm doing is I'm inviting my mom and dad to come visit me. But when my husband is not there. Because when my husband is there, they inevitably talk to my husband and not to me. So I miss out on everything. So now my mom and dad visit with me when it is just I. And I love it. So that is working.

From the Floor: My family runs into extremes. My one cousin has a beard, mustache, and you can't see his mouth and I told him to slow down. I said, please next time, trim it. And he doesn't. My mother has what I call monkey lips. I can't stand it. She exaggerates her speech. I have tried to teach the woman to please speak to me normally and I get monkey lips again. I have come to realize that it is her problem more than it is mine. Sometimes honestly my daughter will interpret for me and my husband will give me "the look" and I know it is not worth it. My husband's family includes me much more. If I want to sit and be alone it bothers them because I can't hear. So they come to me. I don't know how they know because I never taught them a thing. They come to me one at a time.

From the floor: Something that nobody mentioned. Family gatherings are a nightmare for me. I do lip-reading and then get lost. A lot of times what happens is somebody will get excited. And you will try not to interrupt so you get that tiny piece of information so you can at least know what they are talking about. Everybody is excited. They can't be bothered to stop. I think probably because they think it is like a normal interruption in a way. I haven't figured it out to get it through to my family; if I interrupt I don't want to tell my story. I want to know the part I missed. My mother in law, intuitive person that she is, will see me sitting there with a dazed look, and will say, "We are talking about..." And the conversation goes on. It is wonderful that someone pays attention to that.

From the Floor: My husband's family has been much, much more sensitive than my own family, also. They come up with little things like telling me if someone is in the bathroom the light will be on, if it is off it is empty, because they keep the door closed to keep the kids out of there. I think the reason why our spouse's families are perhaps more sensitive to us is because they don't have that history of family dynamic issues.

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