

# Holiday Stress

BY ALISON FREEMAN



## Holidays and social events year-round bring added stress for people with hearing loss

A version of this article appeared on our *Hear This!* Blog in December. Make sure you're signed up to receive helpful HLAA alerts like this at [bit.ly/3VPTbpe](https://bit.ly/3VPTbpe).

Hearing loss is an ever-present stress requiring continual adjustment for each person, place or situation experienced on any given day. Add to that, the stress of a holiday or special event — including family dynamics, lofty expectations, and added social pressures — and you have a perfect storm for stress, anxiety, and avoidance.

### More Than Just Hearing

You, first, must understand that *hearing loss* affects more than just *hearing*. It's a **communication disability** that can affect how you relate to others, and your overall well-being.

I'm a psychologist, with a profound hearing loss, and I see many clients with varying degrees of hearing loss all year-round. Holidays for any person with hearing loss can be a major stress. Without a doubt, I can say that every client of mine who has hearing loss has added anxiety when the holiday season approaches. They fret about how to navigate social events with family and friends, with some opting out altogether.

The stress of dealing with the holidays can be so overwhelming, that many of us dread the times of having to smile and “pretend” our way through conversations and meals.

### Silently Struggling

Let's talk about why this would be. Holidays mean more people, more noise and more talking, which all add up to more struggling to hear and communicate. For starters, think about the difference between someone who wears glasses, versus hearing aids or a cochlear implant. Glasses are visible, hearing aids or cochlear implants are sometimes not visible. And, when they are, people often assume that wearing them means we can hear very well. When we have a hearing loss, it's easy to be as invisible as we want. And perhaps that is exactly the problem, especially around the holidays — we are “silently struggling.”

When we talk to someone who is wearing glasses, we don't give much thought to what it is that they need to see. We can see the glasses — and often we

know the degree of vision loss by looking at the thickness of the lenses. Whereas, hearing aids and cochlear implants are often out of sight, and most importantly, vision loss doesn't affect one's ability to communicate.

## Take Control of What You Can

An essential part of dealing with hearing loss is recognizing that stress is inevitable, rather than trying to avoid it. The task is to learn more effective stress management and communication skills. One of the major factors in effective stress management is being able to recognize when we can be in charge and knowing what we can and cannot control.

## Teachable Moments

When I go into a social situation, I put on my educator's hat and have two basic assumptions that underlie my philosophy for effective communication. First, I assume that most people know little, if anything, about hearing loss. Second, most of these people are embarrassed about asking me what I need to communicate. They often think that they should know what I need, but they really don't, and that embarrasses them.

I truly believe that the more people know and understand about my hearing loss, the more effective communication will be for everyone involved. When I can provide information to them, I often spare them the embarrassment of having to ask me for what I need. When I do this, I not only lower their stress, but mine as well!

For many people with hearing loss, embarrassment and a sense of shame often prevents them from telling others about their hearing loss which often results in giving the wrong impression — being aloof, rude, or stupid. However, if one stops to really think about it, in not addressing your needs, you are really creating your worst fears. So, the question is, would you rather be seen as aloof, rude, stupid, or hard of hearing or deaf?

## Making Choices

So, what is one to do? The key to coping is recognizing where we have a sense of control in making choices. It helps to keep in mind what I call "the three As." In doing so, we can reduce our feelings of powerlessness, victimization, or self-pity.

**The three As are avoid, alternative and/or accept.**

For example, if I am invited to go to a noisy restaurant, I recognize that I may not be able to control the acoustics of a room because of the hardwood floors

or the background music, but I can take charge of communicating my needs.

- I can choose to "beg off" and **avoid** going altogether.
- I could suggest an **alternative**, perhaps going to a quieter restaurant or switching to an earlier, less noisy time.
- I can just **accept** that I will be uncomfortable because it is important for me to be there for a friend or relative's birthday, or other significant event.

## Examples

If I am invited to go to a movie, I can **avoid** going altogether, suggest an **alternative**, like choosing a captioned movie, or just I can just **accept** that I will not understand everything.

A client was invited to a holiday fundraiser at a popular hotel where there would be loud music, dancing, and a speaker who she would struggle to understand. She decided to **avoid** going, but still made a donation to the cause, and **alternately** arranged to meet her colleagues and friends at a separate event.

Hearing loss is a major stressor, and the best coping skills in dealing with stress are **education** and **self-advocacy**. I often choose to save my energy when it's very important and have learned not to sweat the small stuff. I tell clients to mentally prepare themselves before events to educate others and be patient with yourself as you recuperate the next day. Ultimately, the more responsibility you take for your needs, the more you can enjoy the holidays! **HL**

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**For more hints to help you take control and navigate holiday events year-round, visit [bit.ly/3ZpS2Do](https://bit.ly/3ZpS2Do).**

# Google Maps Now Includes Hearing Looped Facilities

By Cheri Perazzoli, Get in the Hearing Loop Program, volunteer committee chair

Having hearing loss requires us to think about how we will hear everywhere we go. This can be particularly challenging in public settings like places of worship, a meeting room, or even a service counter where hearing aids alone are often not enough. Assistive listening systems like hearing loops can help you hear better in different locations — but when you're planning your day out and about, how do you know where hearing loops are?



## Know Before You Go

Thanks to a joint effort by HLAA's Get in the Hearing Loop (GITHL) program and Google, you can now use the Google Maps app to find out before you go if a hearing loop is available at a business or venue. At the request of the HLAA GITHL committee, Google has recently added Assistive Hearing Loop as an accessibility attribute in Google Maps. Having easy access to hearing loop locations will help millions of people with hearing loss find communication access when they venture out. GITHL is helping Google Maps add loop locations to its database, and venues can also update their profiles with this information.

## Hearing Loop Benefits

Hearing loops are user-friendly assistive listening systems that offer easy, immediate, discreet communication access and universal hearing aid compatibility.

A hearing loop system transmits an audio signal directly into telecoil-enabled hearing devices via a magnetic field, greatly reducing background noise. Most prescription hearing aids and cochlear implants have telecoils, ask your audiologist or hearing instrument specialist about how to use this function.

For people without hearing devices or hearing devices without a telecoil, public venues are required to provide hearing loop receivers and headphones. Watch the video at [bit.ly/3QtThgH](http://bit.ly/3QtThgH) on how hearing loops work.

## Google Maps Gamechanger

With Google Maps hearing loop information at our fingertips, we can easily find looped locations and plan

outings, errands, and activities that are hearing accessible. Without this much needed information, we may have simply stayed home.

The new Google Maps feature is good for businesses and entire communities, too. Venues can easily promote their hearing loops and attract more customers, and more people will learn about hearing loss and communication access in their neighborhoods. And all of this combines to make advocating for hearing loops easier.

Globally, you can find hearing loops in theaters, tourist attractions, senior communities, and places of worship. Hearing loops are also appearing in airports, elevators, grocery stores, libraries, and government offices. By improving audio clarity and comprehension in places where it is often difficult to hear, hearing loops help us stay engaged and active.

“When I experienced hearing loops for the first time — seven years after I started using hearing aids — it completely revolutionized my world of hearing,” said Ibrahim (Ib) Dabo, director of Enterprise Business Systems for Global Ministries, United Methodist Church and HLAA board member, “The clarity and proximity of speech are something I never imagined. It significantly improved my understanding of speech and increased my confidence to communicate in challenging settings.”

## How to Access the Google Maps Hearing Loop Accessibility Feature

- On a smartphone, open a Google Maps listing, under the photos, scroll to the right to find the “About” tab. Then click on “About” and scroll down to reveal the Accessibility Attribute; it will be listed under details.
- On a computer, open a Google Maps listing and click on the right arrow next to the location description.

## You Can Help!

- Help spread the word that hearing loops are now on Google Maps. Tell your friends, family and your local venues.
- Write a hearing loop review on a venue's Google Maps listing or use your review to request that a hearing loop be installed. When possible, include a photo of the hearing loop sign.

For more information on hearing loops, how to use them, and how to advocate for them, visit [hearingloss.org/GITHL](http://hearingloss.org/GITHL). **HL**

