

Helping Children with Auditory Processing Difficulties

The ability to make sense of what we hear at school, at home and in our everyday environment is crucial if we are to carry out a wide variety of tasks effectively.

Our hearing (**auditory system**) allows us to listen to sounds, words and sentences and our brain works together with our ears to process and work out the meaning of these sounds. It is vital that our ears and brain work together and co-ordinate fully to achieve the effective processing of these sounds.

What is Auditory Processing?

Auditory processing essentially refers to what happens when the brain '*recognises*' and '*interprets*' the sounds around us.

What is an Auditory Processing Difficulty (APD) ?

- Children with auditory processing difficulties (sometimes call 'disorders') appear to have something that is adversely affects the **processing** or **interpretation** of the information they hear
- APDs are thought to affect between 5-10% of children. Children with an APD usually have **normal hearing ability**.
- The child's brain appears to be having difficulty working out the **meaning of sounds** properly (especially the sounds composing speech) – therefore the ears and the brain are not co-ordinating fully.

How can we recognise APD?

Questions which teachers/ parents should ask in class/ at home:-

- Is the child easily distracted or unusually bothered by loud/ sudden noises?
 - Are distracting environments upsetting to the child? (background noise)
 - Does the child find it easier to cope in quieter settings?
 - Does the child have difficulty following multi-step oral instructions/ directions, whether simple or complicated? (needing to hear only one direction at a time)
 - Does the child have reading, spelling, writing or other speech-language difficulties?
 - Is abstract information difficult for the child to comprehend?
 - Are verbal maths problems difficult?
 - Is the child disorganised and forgetful?
 - Are conversations hard for the child to follow?
 - Does the child take longer time to process information?
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What are the characteristics of APD?

There are 5 main problems areas that can affect both home and school activities for children with APD.

Possible Symptoms	Further Information
1. Auditory Figure-Ground Problems	Where the child is unable to pay attention because of noise in the background. Noisy, low-structured classrooms can be very frustrating
2. Auditory Memory Problems	When child has difficulty remembering instructions such as directions, lists or study materials. It can be immediate ('I can't remember it now') and/or delayed ('I can't remember it when I need it for later')
3. Auditory Discrimination Problems	When child has difficulty hearing the difference between sounds or words that are similar (coat/boat or ch/sh). This problem can affect the ability of the child to follow directions, read, spell and write.
4. Auditory Attention Problems	When child is unable to maintain focus and listen long enough to complete a task.
5. Auditory Cohesion Problems	Relates to higher-level listening tasks – a child will find it difficult to draw inferences from conversations, understand riddles, comprehend verbal maths problems – all of which require heightened auditory processing and language levels. Auditory cohesion develops best when all the other skills are in tact.

How can we help children with APD? – Strategies

There are many strategies which can be applied at school and at home to ease some of the difficulties associated with APD. Some of which are outlined below:

- Acknowledge that these difficulties are REAL – and not within child's control.
- Reduce background noise at home/ school – as this can distract listening tasks.
- Seat child towards front of classroom away from windows – where teacher is most likely to be aware of any confusion or lack of comprehension.
- Ensure that the child looks at you when you are speaking – gain their attention
- Use simple, expressive sentences. Simplify/ explain new vocabulary.
- Speak at a slightly slower rate and at a mildly increased volume
- Keep instructions short and specific – break down into small chunks
- Always pairing 'listening with looking' --- i.e. give written or graphic explanations to a learning task as well as the spoken instruction
- Ask child to keep repeating aloud instructions which are given to them until the instructions are completed. For instructions that are to be completed at a later date, writing notes, wearing a watch and maintaining a predictable routine at home will also help.

- Instructions may need to be repeated before the child fully understands what they have to do. You may need to simplify or slow down your original instruction to help the child process more efficiently.
- Allow extra 'thinking' time for the child who processes information slowly, before giving further instructions.
- When teaching new concepts, the child will benefit from repetition, use of concrete examples, accompanying hands-on and visual materials
- Emphasise key words in what you say by stress and variation in your voice
- Provide child with a quiet place for reading and independent work
- Provide additional aids for study, like an assignment pad or a tape recorder.
- Computer games can be useful – as some of these can help with processing speed utilising both visual and auditory modalities.

Further Information and Useful Resources

www.apduk.org - Auditory Processing Disorder in the UK website.

www.innovative-therapies.com/auditory.htm - provides useful information on APD.