



# THE INCLUSIVE LINK

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## CHILDREN WITH AUDITORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES

Many children are **auditory learners**, meaning they learn primarily by listening. This is essential in school as most tasks require children to follow step-by-step spoken directions. Auditory learners are generally more successful in academic tasks. They may read silently moving their lips or prefer reading aloud. Being good listeners, they can easily follow verbal directions. They like talking about what they have learned and may use self-talk to help remember information.

A child who has difficulties in processing auditory information:

- may have trouble remembering information or instructions given verbally
- may be easily distracted or unusually bothered by loud/sudden noises but his behaviour and performance improves in quieter settings
- may have difficulty solving math problems verbally
- may seem disorganized and forgetful
- may have difficulty understanding abstract information



All these difficulties ultimately affect the child's reading, comprehension and spelling abilities which could then lead to lower academic performance and behavior problems. The problem is usually not with the hearing ability but in how the brain makes sense of the sounds and words spoken. However, it is good to get your child's hearing tested to rule out any hearing difficulties.

For children with auditory processing problems, the ear and brain are having difficulties coordinating input. Thus, information is misinterpreted. Why this is so is not fully understood yet. These children do not recognize subtle differences in words that sound similar (i.e. *chair* and *couch* might become *hair* and *cow*). Even though the speech is loud and clear, the child's reception may be affected by interference coming from background noise or processing problems in the brain.



**Some children are over-sensitive while others are under-sensitive to auditory input!**

Children who over-react to noises or sounds that other children do not notice are considered over-sensitive while those who are under-sensitive lack awareness of sounds and noises that should be noticed. Over-sensitive children dislike loud noises and are easily distracted while at the other extreme, the under-sensitive child needs frequent repetition of instructions and may even make noises to help with concentration.

## STRATEGIES TO HELP CHILDREN WITH AUDITORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES

When a child cannot pay attention if there's noise in the background, it's called Auditory Figure-Ground difficulty. Noisy or less-structured classrooms in which sounds echo or bounce off walls can be very frustrating. *TRY to: Reduce echoes and bouncing of sounds by adding room dividers, bookshelves, floor rugs, wall hangings & bulletin boards to control reverberation.*

When a child cannot stay focused long enough to listen and follow an instruction, he may have Auditory Attention problems. Health, motivation and attitude can also affect a child's attention and listening.

*TRY to: Give a cue, like a tap or a clap, or call him gently by name, to gain his attention before you begin giving instructions. If there is a sudden interruption, wait until the noise stops and then start the instruction from the beginning again. Ask him to repeat the directions back to you. Provide classroom instructions in visual formats using pictograms or key words written on the board.*

When a child has difficulty remembering information such as directions, lists, or study materials, it's known as Auditory Memory problems. It can be immediate: "I can't remember it now" and/or delayed: "I can't remember it when I need it for later".

*TRY to: Make lists for different purposes such as a daily timetable, steps/materials needed for a task, or homework assignments to help him know what he must do.*



When a child has difficulty hearing the difference between words or sounds that are similar (i.e. COAT/BOAT or CHAIR/SHARE), we call it Auditory Discrimination difficulties. This can affect listening, reading, spelling and writing skills.

*TRY to: Sensitize the child. Play games in which the child is blindfolded and has to identify different sounds – i.e. musical instruments, animal sounds, people sounds or make out where the sounds are coming from. Use long blocks that represent sounds that can be made long like /sss/ and short blocks for short sounds like /d/.*

When a child has difficulty remembering the correct order of what is heard, he may have Auditory Sequencing problems. A child needs to remember speech sounds in the right order for spelling and reading.

*TRY to: Teach fun rhymes, poems and jingles that are repetitive but have a particular order. Play sequencing and memory games in which the child has to remember the correct order.*

FINALLY, observe your child and his behavior. Does he seem unaware of sounds (under-stimulated) or easily bothered by noise (over-stimulated)? Does he look at you when you're speaking? Use simple, expressive sentences. Speak slowly using a mildly increased volume. Teachers can make it easier by altering seating plans so the child can sit in the front of the room or with his back to the window and providing additional aids for study, like a message book for regular communication with families. Maintain a positive, patient attitude and have confidence in the child, thus building up his self-esteem!



*(References: Thierry Morlet (2011), kidshealth.org; Dept of Health & Community Services, Australia (2003), Learning Through the Senses Resource Manual: The Impact of Sensory Processing in the Classroom)*

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