Access to Education

Sensory Support

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)

Birmingham City Council

HEARING SUPPORT TEAM

Auditory Processing Disorder

Auditory processing disorder, (sometimes also called auditory processing difficulties, or APD) is a condition where a person has difficulty making sense of the sounds they hear. APD is characterised by poor perception of both speech and non-speech sounds but the most important expression of this difficulty is when listening to speech, particularly in noise. It is has its origins in impaired neural function and is not due to poor attention or deficits in language or other cognitive skills.

APD is not itself a hearing impairment and may be present when there is no hearing loss. Children with APD often have normal intelligence and may have apparently normal language development. Between 4% to 7% of the population may be affected.

Some children with APD behave as if they cannot hear, particularly in places where there is a lot of background noise. Parents sometimes realise their child has difficulty understanding but teachers may be the first to spot the difficulty, especially if the child has difficulties learning to read.

Signs to look out for

Below are some comments made by young people with APD.

- I can't understand what people are saying when it's noisy
- I hear but I don't understand
- I can't remember what I'm told – especially if it's a lot of instructions
- I can't seem to concentrate unless it's very quiet in the room
- If someone talks very quickly, I misunderstand what they say

Children with APD may also have difficulties:

- Understanding when listening to speech
- Locating where a voice or sounds is coming from
- Remembering instructions
- Picking out speech from background noise
- Picking out one voice from others
- Hearing speakers clearly at a distance
- Maintaining attention to speakers – staying focused
- Recognising letter sounds in isolation
- Combining letter sounds to make words
- Breaking down words into their component sounds
- Reading skills
- Remembering spoken messages or instructions

The Hearing Support Team are only able to support children/young people who have been issued with hearing aids/ cochlear implants

In school the main focus will be on improving the listening environment so that competing sounds are reduced to a minimum. The aim of this is to reduce the number of sounds the child has to process in order to understand and remember the language they hear.

Two main causes of a poor listening environment:
Reverberation – is when sounds bounces off hard surfaces in the room, distorts the speech signal and amplifies noise.
Noise – is any sounds other than the one you are trying to hear.

Remember ALL children benefit from a good listening environment.

To reduce these problems:

- Cover hard surfaces with soft materials – carpets, wall hangings, soft pin-boards, curtains, table cloths etc.
- Attach rubber felt ferrules or Hushh-ups® to table and chair legs
- Replace old and noisy fan heaters, fluorescent light fittings or projectors with noisy fans
- Keep windows and doors closed to exclude outside noise. Secondary or double glazed windows are better at keeping noise out
- In extreme cases you may consider having acoustic tiles fitted to the ceiling or having a suspended ceiling installed to reduce reverberation
- Some children may benefit from a remote microphone hearing aid or a personal radio aid to help them to focus on the teacher's voice

To help:

- Position the pupil close to you
- Make sure that light from windows is coming from behind the pupil, not shining in their eyes
- Make sure you get their attention before speaking
- Stand still while speaking, don't move around
- Use short sentences
- Speak at a normal rate and leave pauses between each sentence to give them time to process what you said
- Check understanding at regular intervals by asking open questions
- If they still have difficulty, break down what you have said into shorter sections, re-phrasing what you said
- Use visual clues such as pictures, timetables, reference objects or by writing key words on the board

Plan short breaks for the pupil.
Listening is hard work for people with APD.

Access to Education
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My Care in Birmingham
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49.25 / FEBRUARY 2017