



a publication of the
vermont parent
information
center

topic facts

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Did you hear what I said?

When children have difficulty with auditory processing

W *h* can't Joey remember what his mother asks him to do? She knows he can hear because his hearing test at school is normal. His teacher says he can't follow directions that have a lot of steps. At home it's the same.

When the ear and the brain are not working together, the student may have an auditory processing problem.

Joey can't remember what his homework is, although he says he understood it when his teacher gave the assignment to the class. He also has difficulty remembering information when his mother helps him study for a test.

In the evening, Joey's mother will ask him to clear off the table, set it for dinner, then wash his hands, and call his sister to dinner. She often hears Joey calling to his sister before he sets the table. He has a hard time remembering information. Everyone is exasperated with him and Joey is frustrated with himself because he knows he is doing his best.

When the ear and the brain are not working together and there is a breakdown in understanding spoken language, the student with normal hearing may have an auditory processing problem. The brain fails to receive, remember, and understand information. Most students with this difficulty have normal intelligence.

An auditory processing disorder (APD), or poor ear memory, is accompanied by a slower rate of learning. As a result, a student will take longer to do school work. When this happens, teachers and classmates may feel frustrated and

become impatient with the student because the learning problem is hidden. Others may have difficulty understanding that the student's behavior is not done on purpose.

Many auditory skills may be affected by an auditory processing disorder. The following examples describe the areas in which a child's ability to learn may be affected.

Auditory discrimination problem A student may not hear the difference between "quilt" and "kilt", for example, and may have difficulty with spelling, writing, and reading. Word identification and comprehension would also be affected.

Auditory memory problem A student would have difficulty remembering important information that would affect his or her ability to follow directions, to participate in class discussions, and to study.

Auditory attention problem A student lacks the ability to listen long enough in order to complete a task and understand what is being said, such as in a class discussion or lecture.

Auditory figure-ground problem When there is background noise in the classroom, the student isn't able to pay attention and to sort



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Last revision 3/2003*

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out relevant from irrelevant information. Background noise makes it difficult for the student to understand spoken language.

Auditory integration problem A student has difficulty understanding idiomatic expressions, abstract concepts, words that have more than one meaning, and reaching opinions through conversation.

With the right environment and appropriate instruction, most students can learn to compensate for their auditory processing disorder. What are some strategies that teachers can use to help these students become more effective learners?

Consider where the student sits. Place the student away from distractions or noise and where he or she is able to see the teacher clearly. It's important for the student to have a full view of the speaker's face. The classroom setting should not be distracting. Teachers need to find ways to reduce auditory distractions. Consulting with an audiologist, teachers can determine whether the use of an acoustic device that transmits their voice directly to the student may help.

It's best to use a multi-sensory approach when teaching students with auditory difficulties. Using visual and tactile (tracing and touching) cues helps the student grasp what he or she hears. A multi-sensory approach can be used in helping students learn to

- blend sounds and syllables automatically and to blend ideas for comprehension
- break down sounds in words and ideas in text
- read words accurately and automatically
- learn vocabulary and help with understanding ideas
- understand the big picture so that they have a place to "stick" the details.

Other strategies to help these students learn include visualization, note taking, and self-advocacy skills.

Together teachers and parents can use a variety of tools to help children with auditory processing disorder succeed at home and at school. For example,

- check to make sure the student understands what you are saying
- repeat information
- speak clearly and at a moderate rate
- be patient and allow the student to take more time than normal to respond
- simplify complicated directions by breaking them down step by step
- use pictures and examples to introduce a new idea orally
- make a bridge to past experiences and prior knowledge
- work with the student in deciding what strategies to use at school and at home
- work with other specialists, such as a speech-language pathologist, as needed.

Understanding how frustrated the child with auditory processing difficulty must feel, it's important to be patient and supportive and to build the child's self-esteem. The condition is real and not in the child's control. Proper instruction and appropriate strategies are the keys to the child's success at home, in school, and in the community.