

Auditory Processing

AUDITORY PROCESSING relates to listening and understanding what is said. It is when the ears and brain fully coordinate to hold, sequence and process information. If a child's Auditory Processing is not sufficient to process what is being said, he will be unable to listen effectively. Listening is tiring for these children. 'People who have normal hearing actually hear far more than they perceive. Where hearing is a function of the ear, listening is a function of the brain. Auditory processing explains what happens between the ear and the brain and describes the way the brain assigns significance and meaning to the sounds in the environment.' Children with Auditory Processing challenges often present with hearing, behavioural and/or learning difficulties.

Types of Auditory Processing problems:

- **Auditory Attention** – difficulty attending to spoken language
- **Auditory Figure-Ground** – difficulty understanding when there is background noise
- **Auditory Discrimination** – difficulty noticing the difference between words or sounds that sound similar
- **Auditory Sequencing** – difficulty with number sequences, lists or lists of directions
- **Auditory Memory** – Difficulty remembering information that has been said
- **Auditory Concepts** – difficulty understanding voiced information involving theory or imagination

Signs of Auditory Processing difficulties in children:

The following symptoms may occur at different times Eg: One day a child may be highly distracted, whereas on another day they can focus on that same task

- Lack of concentration and highly distracted especially when background noise is present
- Poor verbal language (Poor pronunciation of words)
- Limited vocabulary
- Jumbles the order of words in their sentences
- Challenging behaviour / hyperactivity signs
- May find everyday sounds irritating or unpleasant (may cover ears or become upset)
- Highly challenges to follow and remember instructions
- Misunderstand what you say

- Have trouble following a conversation
- Look like they are not concentrating or paying attention (“selective listening”)
- May often appear to be ‘daydreaming or zoning out’
- Finds it difficult to repeat a rhythms
- Forgets the sounds a letter makes
- Has difficulty knowing where a sound is coming from
- Has difficulty hearing the differences between sounds

How to help children with Auditory Processing Difficulties:

- Gain the child’s attention before speaking to them – say their name or give them a light touch on the shoulder
- Reduce background noise where possible
- If a child looks at you blankly, and appears to not understand what you said – SOS (Stop – Organise – Shorten)
- Limit the number of words when giving directions
- Only give one or two directions at a time – and give directions in the order they are to be carried out
- Ask the child to repeat the direction to clarify they understand what was said
- Use visual prompts, such as gestures or Boardmaker™ symbol to help the child understand what you are saying
- Allow ‘thinking time’ for the child to process the information
- Demonstrate a task before expecting the child to do it. When you talk, reduce the background noise where possible, or wait for a quiet time
- Use the child’s speech as a guide – if the child regularly uses 3 or 4 word phrases, he will learn best from 3 or 4 being used at a time
- Develop and use routines often – this reduces the amount of listening required
- Avoid criticism – positive reinforcement is the best motivator for children
- Regularly use short sentences with pauses for a child who is overactive, has developmental delay, poor language or English as a second language
- Use consistent words, and keep the number of words to a minimum
- Add an extra word – if child shows you a car, and says “car” add a word and say “blue car”

Where to go if you think your child may have Auditory Processing difficulties

The development of a child’s AP abilities takes 10 to 12 years to mature; and assessments for AP Disorder can only take place after the age of 6. However, if you have any concerns about a child’s hearing, it is advisable to make an appointment with an audiologist; in the meantime implement some of the strategies recommended above.

Note: Hearing Tests are available and Bulk Billed with a GP referral at Wyndham Health Care – 233 Heaths Road Werribee – Phone 9749 2766

If you are concerned about a child’s language development – it is advisable to make an appointment with a speech pathologist. See the PSFO – A Guide to Professional Support for Children