



Jane R. Madell, PhD
CCC A/SLP, LSLIS, Cert AVT
Pediatric Audiology Consulting
450 West 23rd Street
New York, NY 10011
Jane@JaneMadell.com
www.JaneMadell.com

DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE AN AUDITORY PROCESSING DISORDER?

What is an auditory processing disorder?

An auditory processing disorder is the inability or impaired ability to attend to, discriminate, recognize, or understand information that presented auditorily (by listening). Most language is learned by listening. In order to learn auditorily, a child should have normal hearing, be able to listen for significant time periods during a long school day, and be able to learn in a noisy environment typical of every school and home. When a child's auditory abilities break down, it will result in the reduced ability to learn through hearing. Most people with auditory processing disorders have normal hearing and normal intelligence.

What are the symptoms of an auditory processing disorder?

Children with auditory processing disorders may have some or all of the following symptoms:

- respond inconsistently to sound (sometimes they seem to hear and sometimes they do not)
- short attention span
- easily distracted by auditory and visual stimuli
- have difficulty telling where sound is coming from
- become upset by loud sounds
- frequently request that information be repeated
- have a difficult time remembering things they have learned auditorily
- have difficulty with phonics
- have a significant history of chronic otitis media

What causes auditory processing disorders?

Auditory processing disorders have several different causes. Some are caused by neurological disorders, difficulties at birth, meningitis or other viral infections, head trauma, drug abuse, or by hearing loss. The hearing loss can be conductive (caused by problems in the outer or middle ear) or sensorineural (caused by problems in the inner ear). Even a hearing loss which is fluctuating due to repeated ear infections may contribute to an auditory disorder.

How is an auditory processing disorder diagnosed?

The first step is to have a complete hearing test by an audiologist. A screening test like the ones frequently conducted in school and in some pediatricians offices is not sufficient. If the hearing test shows normal hearing, it should be followed by an evaluation of auditory processing testing including the child's ability to understand speech at different loudness levels in quiet and in the presence of noise. Every child must have a recent comprehensive speech and language evaluation to enable us to appropriately score the auditory processing testing.

What can be done if my child has an auditory processing disorder?

Making the diagnosis is an important first step. Once it is diagnosed the child, parents, and school recognize that the child's problems are the result of conditions beyond the child's control and not the result of bad behavior. Some children benefit from speech and language therapy, which is specifically designed to meet each child's needs. Other children are helped by auditory therapy. Changing classroom seating so that the child is close to the teacher may be of help. In some cases children benefit the use of an FM system. [An FM system is a two part radio system in which the child wears a radio receiver and the parent, teacher, or therapist wears a microphone. This allows the child to hear the parent or teacher talking as if the person were talking directly into the child's ear. The FM system bypasses all the competing noise that is interfering with listening.] The program for each child is different and depends on the specific type of auditory processing problems the child is having.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AUDITORY PROCESSING DISORDERS

Contact

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