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How To: Help Your Student With an Auditory Processing Disorder

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What in the world is an auditory processing disorder anyway?

Specific Learning Disabilities come in several varieties, but probably the most common is a disorder of auditory processing. Nearly all students with reading disabilities will have their delays rooted in an auditory processing disorder.

Auditory processing is not hearing, its what you do with what you hear.

Your student with an auditory processing disorder may exhibit some of the following processing problems:

1. Difficulty distinguishing one sound from another (phonemes)
2. Difficulty identifying similarities and differences in sound patterns (rhyming)
3. Difficulty blending, isolating, or separating sounds in words (decoding words).
4. Poor auditory memory

These difficulties with auditory processing may manifest in the following ways:

- Poor listening skills.
- Difficulty following oral instructions or classroom discussions.
- Frequently say, “huh?” or “what?”
- Difficulty with phonics or letter-sound correspondences, sound blending or segmentation.
- Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words.
- Poor spelling.
- Slow fluency of reading.
- Poor reading comprehension.
- Difficulty understanding in the presence of background noise.
- Poor attention, day dreaming, high distractibility (may seem like an attention disorder).
- Give slow or delayed responses to oral questions.
- May be prone to behavior problems due to frustration or boredom (inability to follow the class).
- Avoidance of reading or other difficult tasks.

Typical Grade Levels When Auditory Processing Disorder is identified:

1st grade: When children are not learning letter-sound correspondences.

4th grade: When reading, writing, and lecture become more advanced and less contextual (no pictures).

7th grade: When reading and writing become less narrative (1st person). Demand high-level comprehension in order to complete assignments and comprehend lecture.

How Can I Help My Student With an Auditory Processing Disorder?

There are many easy ways to accommodate and compensate for your student’s disability. Every student’s exact needs are unique and depend on their skills and abilities, however, the following strategies may be among the most successful:

- Preferential seating. Make sure your student is up front.
- Limit background noise during seatwork (may want ear plugs).
- Present directions in short segments, using visual cues if possible.
- Rephrase and repeat what you have explained in simple language.
- Accommodate your student’s slower response time...give them a chance to process.
- Ask the student to repeat back what you said silently to themselves or to you.
- Teach note taking skills or help them improve their technique.

- Maintain structure and routine so directions are predictable.
- Write directions on the board.
- Assign a buddy to your student so they can check understanding.
- Use multi-media presentations.
- Avoid the blah, blah, blah lectures that cause auditory overload.

Sometimes helping students can be a guessing game. Help your student become a “detective” trying to find the strategies that work best for their learning style. Frequently ask them what works and encourage them to self-monitor as much as possible. The goal for every student with a disability is to foster their ability to advocate for what they need to be successful. They will always be their own best advocate, so foster that self-advocacy in your classroom.

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