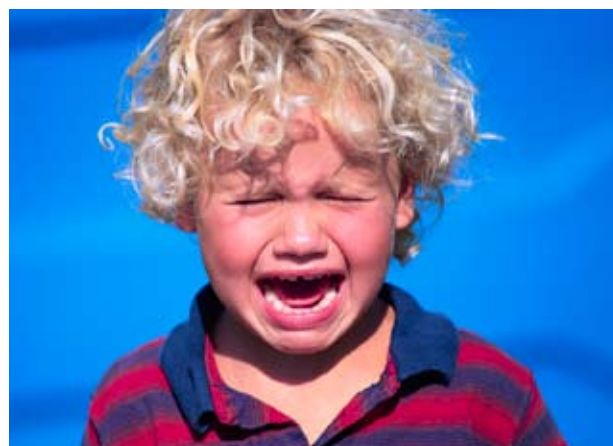


AUDITORY PROCESSING CHALLENGES



WHEN LISTENING **HINDERS** LEARNING...

What children hear and interpret has a huge impact how they learn and behave. Language molds our sense of who we are and helps us understand how we think, work, and play and influences the nature of our relationships.

What happens when a boy appears is able to hear sounds but struggles with making sense of their meaning?

Consider Josh, who has a tough time with learning and social interaction in Kindergarten. Give him one task and he can carry it through. Give Josh three and his eyes glaze over. His teacher complains that he is frequently inattentive, restless and prone to angry outbursts. His parents, worried that his rocky start may sour him on school, request a meeting with his teacher and the school counsellor to explore possibilities to help their son.

Despite their embarrassment about Josh's learning difficulties, they find that the meeting really gets them thinking. Initially they fear that the staff will request a medical assessment for ADHD, but instead they discover tremendous concern for their son and his learning difficulties.

Their shared discussion increases their understanding of his

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strengths and challenges at home and school. A wide-ranging exchange leads to insight about his difficulties and his ups and downs at school. Together they realize that Josh is suffering from serious information overload.

The school counsellor indicates that while for many boys the combination of fewer connecting fibers between hemispheres and a more compartmentalized brain results in the need to attend to one instruction at a time, Josh struggles more than most boys in this regard. She suggests that he may have an auditory processing problem.

She elaborates that for most of us making sense of what we hear seems straightforward, but that listening might be hindered for Josh. She goes on to suggest that it is little wonder he becomes unruly and stubborn as he struggles to listen and cope with the overwhelm of incoming auditory demands. She also indicates that males can have difficulty discriminating what they hear when background noise - as in a noisy restaurant - is present. She adds that auditory processing difficulties are also recognized as a major factor with dyslexia.

Auditory processing difficulties are more common among boys. Despite most having excellent hearing many just do not process the entirety what they hear. They may process part, but without processing the rest, often the whole meaning is lost, or they perceive a totally incorrect idea of what has been said. They may even be able to repeat back word for word without understanding the intended meaning.

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**A PARENT
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• • •

If conversation has a high emotional content, understanding can be even more difficult.

The school counsellor asks several questions that really help **get to the heart** of Josh's difficulty with learning:

- • • Are conversations hard for Josh to follow – especially in certain situations?
 - • • Is Josh easily distracted or unusually bothered by loud or sudden noises?
 - • • Does Josh have difficulty following directions – whether straightforward or complicated?
 - • • Does Josh often ask for repetition or clarification?
 - • • Is he disorganized & forgetful?
- Does his behaviour and performance improve in quieter settings?
-

This checklist of questions does not form a diagnosis.

The blur of background noise or multi-step directions can interfere with some children's ability to process language. These processing difficulties are typically marked by difficulties with decoding phonics, comprehending what is read, and especially with following directions.

The root causes of auditory difficulties are not well understood and can include chronic ear infections, head trauma, lead poisoning and a myriad of unknown reasons. Because there are many different possibilities – even combinations of causes – it is best for children to be assessed on an individual basis.

How is it diagnosed?

While school staffs are often first to suspect auditory processing difficulties, a diagnosis warrants a battery of audiometric tests, administered by an audiologist who is qualified to determine if hearing is impaired, and to what degree. Check with your child's school for a screening process. Also, visit BC Childrens' Hospital for more info:

[http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/ClinicalDiagnosticFamilyServices/Audiology/Forfamilies/\(C\)APD.htm](http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/ClinicalDiagnosticFamilyServices/Audiology/Forfamilies/(C)APD.htm)

What to do at school?

Simply repeating instructions is often counter-productive if a boy is seriously struggling with processing what he hears. The school counsellor offers the following classroom ideas to help Josh better process what he hears:

1. Reduce background noise – including air conditioning and heating systems, traffic, playground, hallway, computers, and fans. Reduce acoustical echoing within the classroom – consider adding room dividers, bookshelves, acoustic tiles, carpet, wall hangings, and sound absorbing bulletin boards.

2. Consider a seating plan that will maximize benefits from auditory and visual cues. Assigned seats should be away from the hall and street noise and not more than 2 meters from the teacher. Provide an optional quiet study area.

3. Provide brief verbal directions. Allow opportunities for students to collaborate with each other to clarify instructions. Before speaker begins, find a novel way to attract students' attention and pause to allow time to catch up and process information. Identify key vocabulary on the board when covering new material and ensure that discussion centers around these words.

Reduce Auditory Stress



4. Increase visual prompts. Provide instructions through physical demonstrations as visual messages may be much easier to store in memory. Strengthen communication with non-verbal and visual cues such as pictures, diagrams, illustrations, mindmaps and flowcharts.

5. Provide frequent breaks and opportunities to relax. Learning is hindered by fatigue, often leading to frustration. Remember that children with auditory processing challenges will expend more effort in paying attention and discriminating information than most kids.

6. Physical activity assists the brain to process & integrate learning.

Undiagnosed, kids can lose confidence & feel insecure. Rather than get real help, they can be criticised or punished. They think they are incapable of overcoming learning difficulties. Boys can especially become isolated, withdrawn, or bored & restless. Rather than feel incompetent & bored, many will become disruptive. They can appear to have difficulties paying attention or following instructions, & are often misdiagnosed as having ADHD. To cover up, some become cynical, argumentative & even aggressive.



To avoid confusing auditory processing difficulties with other disorders that can affect a boy's ability to attend, it is important to emphasize that an auditory processing deficit is often not the result of other higher-order cognitive, language, or related difficulties.

**INCREASE
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SUCCESS**