

Distinguish signs of auditory processing disorder from ADHD

Early childhood educators may assume a preschooler who ignores their pleas for him to sit down during circle time has ADHD. But the child may instead be showing early signs of auditory processing disorder.

Auditory processing is your brain's way of recognizing and interpreting the sounds around you, according to Judy Masone, principal of the Program for Hearing and Vision Services at the Nassau County (N.Y.) Board of Cooperative Educational Services. If a child's auditory processing is compromised, he may hear you normally, but misinterpret what you say, thus appearing to ignore your directions.

"A teacher might say, 'Sit down. Sit down. Sit down,' and Johnny cannot get it together to sit down because his brain doesn't know how to process the information," Masone said. "Teachers have to have a good understanding of what hearing looks like in the early childhood classroom because they may misinterpret this as a behavior problem."

Familiarize your staffers with the signs of auditory processing disorder. By considering a child's phonological awareness, response time to directions, and articulation, you can uncover his challenges with interpreting what he hears. With this information, you can devise an appropriate intervention plan. These interventions can address everything from classroom placement to assistive technology.

Contact Masone at (516) 931-8507. In the next issue, look for a story on shoring up your child find practices when dealing with Head Start programs. ■

Uncover signs of word confusion, slow response to directions

Formal testing for auditory processing disorder usually doesn't take place until a child reaches school because the tests are too sophisticated for young children to complete. That doesn't mean your early childhood educators can't look for early signs a child is struggling to make sense of what he hears. Look for the following signs:

- **Articulation missteps:** A child may perceive sounds inaccurately, then pronounce letters and words incorrectly, said Lynn Carahaly, a pediatric speech-language pathologist at The Alcott Center for Cognitive Enhancement LLC in Richland, Mich. You may say "V" is the first letter in "vase," but he may hear and say "B."

- **Sequencing difficulties:** A child may have auditory memory deficits and struggle to keep words he hears in order, Carahaly said.

- **Social issues:** Children learn best from their peers, said Judy Masone, principal of the Program for Hearing and Vision Services at the Nassau County (N.Y.) Board of Cooperative Educational Services. If a child misinterprets his classmates repeatedly, he will miss out on valuable incidental learning and social experiences.

- **Word confusion:** A child may hear "what" when you say "who," Carahaly said.

- **Syllable and word omission:** A child may cut off a portion of a word, Masone said. You might say "walk," but the child hears "wa."

- **Slow responses:** A child may seem overwhelmed when you give him multistep directions, Carahaly said.

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Address 'academic' challenges in intervention plan

Children with auditory processing disorder may have a learning disability, autism or another disorder, but not necessarily, said Judy Masone, principal of the Program for Hearing and Vision Services at the Nassau County (N.Y.) Board of Cooperative Educational Services. Many preschoolers show some signs of difficulty as a normal part of their development, and without solid educational practices that strengthen language processing, they can be at risk for long-term academic challenges.

"In some states, auditory processing disorder isn't even recognized as an academic problem, ... but it's directly linked to learning disabilities," said Lynn Carahaly, a pediatric speech-language pathologist at The Alcott Center for Cognitive Enhancement LLC in Richland, Mich.

Masone said any intervention plan should have three primary components: environmental modifications, com-

pensatory strategies, and direct remediation activities. Consider the following:

- **Classroom placement:** Children may not process what a teacher says if his back is to the classroom and his words become absorbed by the wall, Masone said.

- **Extra time:** Implement a five-second rule before calling on children, Carahaly said. This gives children with APD an opportunity to raise their hands instead of always watching others answer questions quickly.

- **Assistive technology:** Depending on the type of APD children have, they may benefit from auditory training devices, which can limit background noise, Masone said.

- **Games:** Ask children in a circle to name something they like and recall in order their classmates answers, Carahaly said. This can build the auditory memory and sequencing skills of those with APD without singling them out. ■