

Listening Problems Often Perceived As Attention Deficit Disorder; But Is It?

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Does your child hear fine but listen poorly? Some parents refer to this as selective hearing. However, your child may truly have trouble listening.

While hearing is the ability to detect sound, listening is how the brain processes auditory information. Children with poor auditory processing skills tend to exhibit the following problems:

- Have a hard time hearing in noisy environments
- May behave like a child with a hearing loss
- Difficulty with speech sound discrimination
- Difficulty comprehending spoken and/or written language
- Problems following directions
- Can be easily distracted in noisy environments
- Hard time following a conversation
- Problems with reading comprehension
- Trouble understanding verbal math problems
- Difficulty reading, spelling and/or writing
- Trouble recalling a story in proper sequence

Your child's teacher may comment on some of the above behaviors expressing concern regarding attention. But is it really attention? Although some of these Auditory Processing Disorder behaviors are similar, children with AD/HD often:

- Ignore details making careless mistakes
- Have trouble sustaining attention in work and play
- Seems to not listen and daydreams while doing homework, reading or in class
- Does not follow through on instructions
- Loses things he/she needs
- Can be easily distracted by extraneous noise
- Is forgetful and can't remember lessons from one day to the next
- Has a poor sense of time
- Is considered to be extremely talkative
- Has poor organizational, planning and sequence skills
- Procrastinates and has poor follow through skills
- Can hyper-focus on things and has poor shifting skills

Auditory Processing problems can closely mimic AD/HD symptoms. If a child is having a hard time processing auditory information, he or she will often appear to not be paying attention.

It is like a bad cell phone connection in that the child just doesn't have a good signal. Therefore, he or she does not get all of the information, which can result in inattentive behaviors.

While an Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) can coexist with an Attention Deficit Disorder, some children are being misdiagnosed with AD/HD when the deficits actually lie more in the auditory system.

To make matters even more confusing, children with a proper AD/HD diagnosis typically can have some auditory processing deficits; however, APD is not the primary diagnosis. It is a secondary deficit to the Attention Deficit Disorder. Furthermore, each diagnosis has its own subtypes (i.e. AD/HD Inattentive or Hyperactive Type or Phonemic APD).

Therefore, it is critical to understand the underlying cause of a child's learning problem rather than focusing on the symptoms. Professionals that might be involved in providing a differential diagnosis between and Attention Deficit Disorder or an Auditory Processing Disorder may include a Speech-Language Pathologists, Audiologist, and/or a Psychologist or Neuropsychologist.

Auditory processing difficulties are typically cited in children with conditions such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, autism, language impairments, pervasive developmental disorder, or developmental delays.

Auditory processing difficulties are a strong underlying cause of dyslexia. Neurologists at Yale have examined brain images of children's reading. From MRI brain scans, researchers discovered that the auditory/language centers of children who read well light up with lots of blood flowing.

Other children with less blood flow in those areas had difficulty in reading. Studies such as this confirm that children who have a strong ear-brain connection tend to be good readers.

Additional studies have concluded that children with multiple ear infections, a speech articulation problem or weaknesses in auditory skills are at risk for having reading disorders.

If you or your child's classroom teacher has concerns with your child's ability to focus and listen, additional testing of your child's auditory and language processing abilities should also be consider.

It is often a big piece of the puzzle that is often overlooked and can help determine the appropriate treatment method.

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