

## HUH? WHAT? AUDITORY PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

“After the second grade at school, I started to get into trouble and seemed to spend a lot of time in detention or out in the hall. I was disruptive (because I did not hear what I was disrupting), and noisy (because I could not monitor the loudness of my voice). My behavior in some cases was inappropriate (because I could not pick up subtle conversational cues or follow fast –paced conversations)...Academically I was doing poorly. Socially, I was doing even worse.” – BEVERLY

Despite normal audiograms many children have difficulty hearing in certain circumstances, rather than with attention per se. Many of those children show severe deficits in processing sound in the presence of background noise. Most of us drastically underestimate the importance of the auditory system in learning. Almost every school activity- from listening to teachers to interacting with classmates to singing along in music class to following instructions during gym- depends upon the ability to process sound.

Unfortunately, auditory processing (i.e., hearing) problems are surprisingly common among schoolchildren. In America, nearly one in five schoolchildren has a measurable problem with hearing, and studies have shown that 37 percent of children with mild to moderate hearing loss fail at least one grade.

### **Behaviors Suggesting Decreased Hearing:**

Behaviors that suggest a child is having difficulty hearing are the most easily recognized signs of an auditory processing disorder:

- Diminished response to voices or loud noises
- Difficulty hearing in the presence of background noise
- Worse hearing indoors than out, especially in echo-prone rooms with bare walls and floors
- Difficulty understanding what’s said
- A tendency to ask for restatement or clarification, or repeatedly saying “What?” or “Huh?”
- Marked difficulty understanding speakers with particularly high or low-pitched voices or with prominent accents.
- Significant day-to-day or situational variability in hearing, which may lead parents or teachers to suspect attention-related problems.

### **Behaviors That Suggest Unusual Sensitive Hearing:**

Surprisingly, behaviors suggesting unusually sensitive and or acute hearing can also be signs of an auditory processing disorder:

- Sensitive to sounds that don’t bother others.
- Preference for quiet and solitary activities over group situations like birthday parties; preschool, school, or religious instruction classes; indoor malls; or swimming pools.
- A tendency in noisy environments to become withdrawn or anxious, to cover ears, to appear highly distractible, or to become “explosive”.

### **Behaviors That Suggest Speech and Language Difficulties:**

Certain difficulties with language intake or output may be signs of auditory processing disorders:

- Delayed speech onset.
- Persistent articulation errors.
- Abnormally soft, loud, flat, formal, or “pedantic “ speaking voice.
- Difficulty conducting casual conversations.
- Trouble reading or spelling due to difficulty discriminating word sounds.
- Difficulty following oral directions.
- Difficulty organizing behaviors.
- A tendency to appear quiet, distracted or off topic during group discussions or to interrupt or blurt out answers.
- Long delays before responding to questions or instructions.
- Preferences for nonverbal tasks or a markedly higher performance IQ than verbal IQ.
- Difficulty taking notes
- Worsening performance (or diminished attention) in higher grades as oral instruction load and receptive language demands increase.
- Difficulties with inference, abstraction, and figurative language that are greater with “listened” than “read” material.

### **Behaviors That Suggest Impaired Attention or “Low Intelligence”**

Some behaviors suggesting poor attention or low cognitive potential may be signs of an auditory processing disorder:

- Difficulties paying attention, especially with auditory intensive materials.
- Unusual difficulty following directions.
- Avoids talking to others.
- Does not enjoy being read to.
- May appear slow and spacey.
- Becomes confused and frustrated when spoken to.
- Seems to exist largely in a self-contained world.
- Tunes out and day dreams a lot.

We will discuss the Part II of this topic in August 2010 issue of the magazine and inform readers about the causes, risk factors and the treatments of the Auditory Processing Disorders.

Dr. O