Torbay and South Devon
NHS Foundation Trust

PATIENT INFORMATION

Difficulty listening, processing and auditory memory concerns

Tips and Advice

It may have been suggested by some professionals that your child has Auditory Processing Difficulties, or Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)?
Currently in the UK there is no agreed consensus for testing to assess or diagnose APD. We can only give advice and recommendations.

Auditory processing difficulties can be completely stand-alone but can also be part of another diagnosis. For example, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
Your Local Authority and School may be able to help you with exploring these further if you have concerns
Anxiety, stress, tiredness, and other distractions can also add another level of difficulty listening.

Listening is one of the most important skills for children to master, but it doesn't always come easily, however with a bit of work, you can help your child develop their listening ability.

This leaflet has been designed to enable you as a parent/ carer/ teacher to help and encourage your child to listen and concentrate to the best of their ability.

Hearing and listening are different skills

Hearing is the ability to detect sound. This can be tested in clinic.

Listening is the ability to pay attention to sounds, or to make a conscious effort to hear.
Children are exposed to many environments; some require more listening skills than others. It is important that children learn to listen well at home. However, even if they develop good listening skills at home, some children can find it difficult in busier situations where there are more distractions. Children with a history of hearing difficulties may struggle more.

Controlling and reducing background noise at home

- Turn down the TV or radio when you want to talk to your child
- Do not try to have a conversation when you and your child are in different rooms, stop what you are doing and have the conversation in the same room.
- Be aware of other background noises from appliances, such as the washing machine
- Close the door to background noises
- Use soft furnishings and fabrics to help improve acoustic properties

Tips to help improve your child's listening skills

- Gain your child's attention first (use their name)
- Move closer to your child rather than shout
- Ensure they are looking at you when you're speaking, getting down to their level can also help.
- Speak clearly and at a slightly slower rate, allow more time for comprehension.
- Allow the child enough time to think and respond.
- Use simple, expressive sentences and break instructions down into smaller chunks.

  Ask your child to repeat back the directions and keep repeating them aloud to themselves
- If they are older and able, encourage writing notes and general organisational skills.

Using the tips above ensures that your child is actively listening to you (giving you full attention) not passively listening (where they are hearing, but not paying attention)

Activities and games that can help learn to listen

Memory games:

- **What's missing** - put a few things on the table and take one away, see if your child can identify which item is missing
- **Alphabet memory game** – choose a topic, such as animals, and ask your child to use each litter in the alphabet to come up with a different animal e.g. ant, bear, cat, dog etc
- **I went shopping and bought** – gradually add extra items to the list and test your child's memory (and listening skills)
- Give your child a simple set of instructions, e.g. two hops and one jump and ask them to follow them and gradually increase the length of the sequence

Listening games:

- Clapping a rhythm for your child to repeat.
- Describing a picture to your child, which they then draw based on your description.
- Playing 'What's That Sound?', using household objects to make a noise (e.g. shaking a peppermill, deflating a balloon) and getting your child to guess what it is.
- Same / different game get your child to listen to two sounds with their eyes closed and
- Listening walks, where you take time to stop and pay attention to the sounds you can hear. Guess what the sound is and where the sounds are coming from

Stories:

- Read aloud to your child and discuss what you have read
- Read familiar stories and omit certain parts and ask your child to supply the missing information
- Listen to stories together using audio books and ask them questions.

Strategies for in School

- Ask the teacher to minimise background noise as much as possible in the classroom e.g. noise from other classrooms and traffic or machinery sounds via open windows
- Ask the teacher to think about classroom placement, ensure your child is nearer to the teacher, has their back to the window and has a clear view of the board or teacher.
- Reduce both auditory and visual distractions which compete for the child's attention – other conversations and movement are the worst of these distractions
- Get the child's full attention prior to giving instructions using a tactile prompt such as a pat on the hand, calling the child's name, or establishing eye contact
- Simplify instructions using one-step directions
- Write down key words or assignments
- Promote understanding by using key vocabulary which reduces the chance to mishear or misunderstand.
- Use mind maps, handouts, power points as well as verbal. These can provide good reinforcement for students with weaker auditory skills
- If possible, provide additional aids for study like a voice recorder (available on most smart phones) or a tape recorder and try to ensure a quiet study place is available.
- Sensory breaks may be beneficial throughout the day for the child to re-focus