

# Children with Listening Difficulties

## Community Paediatric Audiology Service



Some children have difficulty analysing or making sense of information they have heard, despite having normal hearing as recorded on an audiogram. No two children are alike, each presents with different strengths and weaknesses. Auditory processing skills continue to develop and mature into the early teens.

Listening is a skill that needs time, patience and practice to develop.

**Some frequently described difficulties are listed below:**

- poor concentration or attention span
- easily distracted by auditory and visual stimuli
- difficulty listening in background noise
- poor auditory memory and retrieval, both in the long-term and the short-term
- spoken language and literacy difficulties
- slow or delayed responses when spoken to
- difficulty following directions
- misunderstanding what is said
- frequently requesting repetition of what is said
- reliant on visual cues, e.g., watches speakers face closely
- difficulty localising the source of a sound
- behaviour problems
- a history of chronic middle ear infections and possible fluctuating hearing loss
- poor self-esteem

## **What to do?**

- Identify the area(s) of weakness
- Identify strategies to accommodate these difficulties:
  - at home
  - at school

NOTE: if your child already receives special educational assistance, discussion with these people can help identify problems and develop solutions.

## **STRATEGIES**

### **Concentration / Attention**

Children with listening difficulties must actively listen so must put more effort into listening than other children. They are therefore more likely to be tired towards the end of a school day. As a consequence, concentration and attention will be affected. Short periods of instruction followed by periods when listening is not required may be beneficial.

## **Background Noise**

Children with listening problems are less good at selecting out or ignoring background noise, even when they are trying hard to listen.

During homework or reading times, provide a quiet place and limit visual distractions

- turn off the television and radio
- turn off other electrical appliances, e.g., washing machine, vacuum cleaner
- minimise other noisy activities, e.g., children/adults talking or laughing
- close windows if there is a lot of noise outside.

Many children with listening difficulties are not able to block-out background noise and they may find that some sounds are unpleasant.

- Observe your child's behaviour. If there are situations that are not comfortable, look at ways of improving the situation or developing coping strategies for your child.

Some children feel constantly bombarded by sound. This can make it difficult for them to hear and retain spoken information when other sounds are competing.

- Delay important conversations until a quiet time can be found. Make a point of having "quiet conversation periods" on a regular basis during the course of every day.

Some children become very focused on the task in hand, to the exclusion of other information.

- Get your child's attention before giving directions or instructions, e.g., say your child's name or gently touch him/her to refocus attention to you.

## Understanding

- When talking with your child learn to control the environment by providing a quiet setting.
- Find regular quiet periods each day for family conversation. Family mealtime is useful because it provides a good lip-reading situation as well as listening time (and you have to wait for the slowest eater!) Make sure your child with listening difficulties is included in the conversation and is given sufficient time to respond and give an opinion.
- Simplify your language level if your child does not seem to understand. Try slowing down your rate of speech. Pause between sentences, especially after your child has finished talking and before you respond.
- Keep instructions relatively short and concise. · If you have to repeat something for your child try saying it in a different way, rephrasing using different words – some words are easier to understand than others.
- Encourage your child to ask when they do not understand what has been said. Don't just ask if they heard or understood, the answer is likely to be "yes".
- Don't attempt to talk from another room or when your child is busy doing something else. Wait until you get their full attention, both looking and listening.

## Memory Difficulties

- **Keep instructions relatively short and concise**
- Read aloud to your child and discuss what you have read.

## Behaviour Problems

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Your child may seem to hear inconsistently, hearing some things but not others. It is important not to assume that they are purposely ignoring you. Be sure that all family members apply rules and management strategies.

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Your child is probably working harder to hear and understand speech all through the day and may need time to rest and recuperate after school. Allow time for relaxation before asking for homework or chores to be done.

- When telling your child off, make it clear what specific behaviour is being punished and why.

## Self Esteem

- Praise any accomplishments (academic or otherwise) that represent even small improvements over previous levels.
- Find something that your child is good at or enjoys and encourage them to develop it.
- **Emphasise your child's strengths. It is not helpful to compare his/her achievements with other children. Most children are very aware of their own performance compared to brothers and sisters and classmates. They do NOT need to be reminded of their weaknesses.**



## For further information about this service contact:

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