

Support for children and young people (CYP) with Auditory Processing Difficulties (APD) Policy

DEFINITION:

Auditory processing disorder (APD) results from impaired neural function and is characterised by poor recognition, discrimination, separation, grouping, localisation or ordering of non-speech sounds. It does not result from a deficit in general attention, language or other cognitive processes.

(Source: British Society of Audiology: APD Special Interest Group)

For the most up to date definition please refer to p. 5-6, British Society of Audiologists (BSA), [Position Statement & Practice Guidance Auditory Processing Disorder \(APD\)](#), (2018)

APD often co-exists with other sensory, cognitive neurological or psychological difficulties/disorders but we are not able yet to determine the precise nature of the relationship between them. APD may be causative or symptomatic or may result from a common underlying cause of another disorder/s. The prevalence of APD in the population is estimated by some researchers to be between 4-7%.

People with APD often report difficulties with:

- Understanding when listening to speech
- Reading
- Remembering instructions
- Staying focused while listening
- Discriminating speech in background noise

APD may impact on speech perception, however the term APD should only be applied when there is a measurable problem with at least some aspect of processing of non-speech sounds.

APD is not of itself a hearing impairment and may be present when there is no hearing loss as assessed by detection of the thresholds of hearing across the speech frequency range.

IDENTIFICATION AND DIAGNOSIS

Some CYP with APD behave as if they cannot hear. Hearing, and listening, in noisy places can be especially difficult. Although some parents realise their CYP has difficulties with understanding at an early age, APD often becomes more obvious when the CYP start school. Teachers and practitioners may be the first to spot the difficulty, especially if the CYP has difficulties learning to read.

Some comments made by CYP with APD:

- I can't understand what people are saying when it's noisy
- I hear but I don't understand
- I can't remember what I'm told – especially if it's a lot of instructions
- I have a terrible time trying to learn French
- I can't seem to concentrate unless it's very quiet in the room
- If someone talks very quickly, I misunderstand what they say

Some comments from parents and teachers of CYP with APD:

- My child finds it hard to concentrate
- The teacher feels my child acts like he can't hear, but he's always passed the health visitor and school hearing screens
- One of my students is performing poorly in reading but I know she is bright, and I don't understand why this is difficult for her

If the above circumstances apply to a CYP you know, the first step may be to have their hearing tested. The GP can make a referral to the Paediatric Audiology clinic, but it is important for you to highlight your concerns. If no hearing loss is diagnosed the record of your concerns will alert the audiologist to the possibility of APD.

The local audiologist may refer the CYP for further assessment in order to determine if APD is present.

APD Listening Test

This test is carried out in a hearing clinic. The listening test is introduced as a computer game. It is similar to an odd-man-out game and so is fun to do. Most CYP enjoy playing this game. The CYP sits in a very quiet room (a sound booth) and listens to sounds played through headphones. The sounds are not loud or uncomfortable, but they may vary in:

- Pitch (high or low)
- Loudness (quite loud or very soft)
- Type of sound

The computer checks how the CYP responds to these sounds, and then produces an '*auditory processing ability*' score. Each CYP's score is then compared with auditory processing scores from other CYP of the same age.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

By Audiology Clinic/Speech and Language Therapy Services

- Hearing training programmes and strategies (exercises to help the CYP understand better when listening)
- Parental support programmes

By setting/Local Authority

- CYP could sit closer to the teacher/ practitioner's desk to aid lip-reading and other cues
- Teacher/ practitioner could be asked to check CYP is looking and listening when instructions are given out, especially if the teacher/ practitioner walks around when talking
- Teacher/ Teaching Assistant/ Practitioner could be asked to check CYP has heard and understood the instructions
- (For older CYP) Teacher/ practitioner could be asked to provide written information which may be used to consolidate verbal instructions
- Measures to reduce classroom noise could be introduced (Refer to advice sheet)
- Listening devices could be provided to make speech clearer in noise – e.g. a soundfield system in the main classroom or a personal assistive listening device (PALD)

In the home

- Family could encourage the CYP to do any listening exercises as recommended.
- Family could check CYP is looking and listening when appropriate
- Background noise in the home (i.e. TV /music) could be reduced when trying to communicate.

SEND ADVISORY SERVICE: HI's POSITION ON APD

SAS:HI do not provide direct support for children with APD, as they do not have a diagnosis of a hearing loss.

Hearing Impairment Specialist Teachers (HISTs/ QToDs) can signpost settings in Hillingdon to further information to develop their awareness of how to support CYP who have a diagnosis of APD.

Settings should be aware that not all CYP with a diagnosis of APD would be affected in the same way or to the same extent. It's important to establish how CYP are affected to plan appropriate support. It is reasonable to use evidence of the CYP's progress in school to assess the impact of APD on the CYP in question and the effectiveness of any support that has been put in place.

Where clinics recommend provision of soundfield systems or personal assistive listening device (PALD) systems the clinic should be able to demonstrate that:

- The CYP's perception of speech in noise is substantially worse than that of other CYP of their age.
- The CYPs perception of speech in noise is substantially improved with an increase in the speech to noise ratio as may be provided by the equipment recommended.

Settings may then consider how they may provide appropriate facilities if this is necessary to secure appropriate progress in school.

References:

British Society of Audiologists (BSA),

[Position Statement & Practice Guidance Auditory Processing Disorder \(APD\)](#), (2018)

BSA/ BAToD/ NatSIP, [Briefing paper; Auditory Processing Disorder, An Education Response \(2015\)](#)

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**SEND ADVISORY SERVICE
CHILDREN SERVICES**