

# What is Auditory Processing Disorder?

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APD stands for Auditory Processing Disorder, a disorder that affects about 2-5% of the population.

Auditory Processing Disorder occurs when the ears send imprecise information to the brain. This may mean a mixing up of similar words like “fair” and “hair” or “let” and “wet.” It may also mean an inability to filter out other sounds. Imagine hearing only the last part of the word. You may not immediately understand, and you will need some time to use contextual clues to figure out the speaker’s intended meaning.

Auditory processing difficulty may result in the inability to remember the first part of a sentence or a list. Especially if there are distractions, listening can prove difficult and overwhelming. Imagine being in a loud, crowded room. A fan whirring nearby or a blender grinding fruit, or even a collective buzz of other voices can interfere with reception of sound. While people without APD can target the specific sound they want to hear, those with APD hear everything at once and at the same decibel, like a carnival of noise where no one sound can be isolated or deciphered. Children with APD haven’t yet learned how to cope when all the sounds are muddled or when information gets lost before it can be stored properly in the brain for immediate retrieval.

APD can be especially challenging in conversation because someone with APD may not receive extra time from others, which often creates feelings of frustration and confusion. A child with APD may stop listening altogether if it proves too difficult, time-consuming, or overwhelming. They simply avoid the burden of asking questions to understand a conversation that’s moving much too fast.

## What Auditory Processing Disorder is **not**

Because of the particular challenges APD presents, it often goes undiagnosed. Also, commonly, a child’s auditory processing deficits are mistakenly attributed to other disorders or are dismissed as intentional poor behavior. Here is a list of some of the most common assumptions made about a child’s behavior that is undiagnosed with APD.

**A child with APD may be (mistakenly) thought to have:**

- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism
- Deafness
- Lack of intelligence
- Willful stubbornness
- Voluntary defiance

A child with APD may also possess any of these problems, but it is important to consider these symptoms as signs of APD so we can properly diagnose APD and work to minimize its effects.

**A child may have APD if he or she exhibits the following signs:**

- Trouble paying attention
- Trouble following directions
- Low academic performance
- Behavior problems
- Poor reading and vocabulary

## What should you do if you suspect APD?

If you suspect that a child or student has APD, you can have them tested by an audiologist and also rule out some of these other issues. The American Speech Hearing Association indicates most APD testing requires children to be at least 7 or 8. Often, audiologists recommend retesting around age 12 because test results can be skewed by younger children's' brain variability. The important thing to remember is that with an accurate diagnosis, even despite the challenges APD presents for children, there are viable treatments and accommodations available.

## What can you do about APD?

1. **Use an evidence-based intervention to build processing speed.** Studies have shown that the [Fast ForWord](#) program actually changes the brain's ability to process auditory information, which results in lasting and meaningful achievement.
2. **Use visual cues to aid in understanding.** Providing some context by using another learning mode can soften the stress a child may feel since words are often overwhelming.
3. **Give time to think and answer.** Patience goes a long way in helping children understand because it gives them a moment to put the pieces of the puzzle together.
4. **Read aloud regularly.** Have your child or students follow along and practice sounding out the words after you say them. By reading aloud and using clear language, you can have a direct role in the improvement of language acquisition, reading ability, and auditory processing.
5. **Enunciate words and check for understanding.** Often, parents and teachers make assumptions about why a child won't answer a question or why they seem obstinate. APD can be especially challenging because it is impossible to truly know what the child hears. By asking a child to repeat your request or to answer in context, you can know whether or not he/she hears you accurately.

Most kids want to please, and they are truly trying their best even when that may not appear to be the case. By giving each child the benefit of the doubt and choosing kindness first, you will build a loving connection. An emotionally safe environment encourages children to put fears aside, and when they do this, they will be better equipped to focus on learning.