

A Quick Guide to Auditory Processing

For teachers, SENCos and families

What is auditory processing?

Auditory processing describes how the brain notices, distinguishes and makes sense of sound, including spoken language. Listening difficulties can occur even when routine hearing levels are normal. However, a classroom difficulty with listening does not automatically mean auditory processing disorder (APD). Hearing, language, attention, memory and the listening environment can all influence what a pupil understands.

What this may look like in the classroom

Speech in noise	Difficulty following one voice when there is classroom or group background noise.	Fast speech or accents	Needing more time to adjust to unfamiliar accents or a rapid speaking rate.
Similar speech sounds	Mishearing words that sound alike or needing extra context to distinguish them.	Sound location	Finding it difficult to identify where a voice or another sound is coming from.
Spoken instructions	Losing part of an instruction, especially when it is long or delivered quickly.	Listening fatigue	Concentration reducing after sustained listening, particularly in noisy settings.
Group conversation	Losing the thread when several people speak or the speaker changes rapidly.	Literacy learning	Difficulty holding or distinguishing speech sounds may add to reading and spelling demands.

Remember: These signs do not diagnose APD. Concerns about hearing or understanding speech should be discussed with the family and may require referral to a GP, audiology or another appropriate specialist.



How to help: practical strategies

Small and consistent adjustments can make a meaningful difference. Support should respond to need and does not require a diagnosis.

01 Talk face to face Gain attention first and keep your face visible while giving key information.	08 Allow processing time Pause after a question or instruction before expecting a response.
02 Reduce background noise Close doors or windows where practical and avoid speaking over other sound.	09 Repeat or rephrase Use different words or a visual example rather than simply speaking louder.
03 Improve access to the speaker Agree seating with a clear view and good access to the main sound source.	10 Reduce transcription Provide slides or notes so the pupil can listen and annotate rather than copy everything.
04 Use short spoken steps Break longer explanations into manageable parts and pause between them.	11 Check understanding Ask the pupil to explain or demonstrate the next step in a supportive way.
05 Add text and visuals Support speech with written keywords, pictures, models or a worked example.	12 Review and summarise Revisit the important points during the lesson and provide a brief summary at the end.
06 Give the overview first Explain the purpose and sequence before adding detailed instructions.	13 Plan listening breaks Build in short changes of activity when sustained listening creates fatigue.
07 Pre-teach vocabulary Introduce unfamiliar words and concepts before they are needed in a busy lesson.	14 Follow specialist advice Use hearing technology or specific listening programmes only when recommended and reviewed.

Auditory processing and dyslexia

Auditory and phonological processing can both affect how speech sounds are handled. They overlap in some pupils but are not interchangeable. Reading or spelling difficulty alone is not evidence of APD.

Assessment boundaries

APD assessment sits with specialist hearing services and NHS guidance states that testing is not usually completed below age 7. Defining Dyslexia can assess dyslexia and the wider SpLD profile, but does not diagnose APD or replace an audiology assessment.

Further support

Defining Dyslexia: SpLD assessment and support	NHS: auditory processing disorder	PATOSS: professional information and standards
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Where hearing or speech understanding is a concern, families should seek advice from their GP or local audiology service.

