Occupational Therapy Advice

2016

Supporting auditory processing in the classroom (Older Child)

Information

Around 5-7% of the total population of school-aged children are affected by a weakness in auditory processing. Auditory processing refers to how a person's brain processes, or interprets, auditory information received from the environment. Children with auditory processing difficulties (APD) can have difficulty following verbal directions (particularly those with more than one step), and often have trouble learning new material that is presented orally.

Children with auditory processing difficulties react to changes in their environment differently. No two children have exactly the same deficits; therefore, using the same classroom strategies for all APD children will not work. Teachers must have a treasure trove of different strategies for different needs of different children!

Here are a variety of strategies to assist children with processing auditory information within the classroom environment:

Get Attention

• Assign a peer partner to assist the child needing help with getting assignments down correctly, completing group projects, taking notes, and preparing for tests. Because it is difficult for children with auditory processing difficulties to watch and take notes simultaneously, give the child a copy of the teacher's notes, a study guide, or another student's notes. Allow children to tape lessons for future reference and study.

• Give children that have difficulty processing auditory information more time to transition between activities. Name the new activity and explain in a few steps what is going to happen. Review and close the activity by summarizing what the children should have learned before transitioning to the next activity.

• Use a cueing system to help the child refocus when they are not paying attention. Use words like "listen," "get ready," and "you'll want to remember this one" when you are about to present key information.

Preferential Seating Arrangements

• Seat the child as close as three, but not farther than eight feet away from the teacher, sound source, or activity to maximize auditory/visual information. Allow children to move around for different activities and sit wherever they are able

to attend and actively participate.
• Seat the child away from distracting noises (fish tank, doors, bathrooms, windows, etc.).
• Provide quiet or isolated places for study and work to minimize distractions.
• Use a daily routine or schedule to keep children focused and organized.
• Allow APD children to use earplugs or earmuffs while doing seatwork to eliminate noise or distractions.

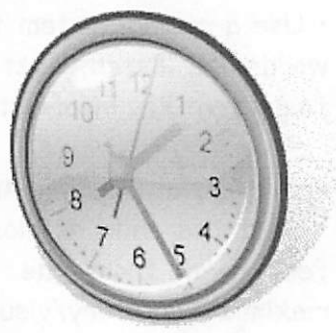
Focused Instruction

• Speak at a rate and volume level loud enough for children to follow. Vary loudness to increase children's attention using intonation and stress, but never over-exaggerate your speech. Repeat important words and use gestures to enhance instruction and comprehension.
• Alert distracted children by calling their name or giving a cue, and repeat their name periodically to keep their attention.
• Define a purpose for different activities and give direct, uncomplicated, and age-appropriate instructions for the task. Reduce verbal instruction. Repeat instructions step by step if necessary and allow time for children to process the information.
• Provide examples by modelling or demonstrating and leave the example on display. Emphasize key words. Encourage children to ask questions. Check children's comprehension by asking questions periodically.

• Boost self-confidence by giving children positive feedback.
• Repeat or paraphrase instructions. Ask children to explain the directions to you to confirm their understanding.
• Review the first few items of the task at hand to help keep children focused. Watch for signs of inattention or decreased concentration. Intervene with questions to keep children focused.
• Allow children to read quietly or repeat directions to themselves (subvocalize).

Preview and Review Consistently

• Preview, review, and summarize all new and previous lessons including vocabulary words and concepts. Relate new material to previous lessons and experiences.
• Provide a short preview, outline, list of new vocabulary, and key points for class discussion and as a guide for parents to help with homework and review for tests.
• Keep parents and resource teachers informed of the upcoming topics and lessons.
• Encourage children to express their opinions, answer questions, read aloud, etc. in all activities.



Flexible Time

• Give short breaks between activities to help children avoid fatigue.
• Allow extended time to complete tasks.
• Give children adequate time to respond to questions that include comprehension, generalizing information, or explaining a process.

Organization in the Classroom

• Encourage using an agenda or other organizer for recording assignments, test dates, important school events, field trips, etc. Teachers or peer helpers can check the agenda daily to make sure assignments and other information have been written correctly. Have children's parents/caregivers initial the agenda periodically to keep on-going communication. (This is a great way to send frequent notes and comments to parents!)

Let us know if you have any questions!

Hounslow and Richmond NHS
Community Healthcare
NHS Trust

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Ideas To Improve Attention and Concentration

Suggested strategies and activities:

CLASSROOM ROUTINE:

* Do some wake up activities with the whole class before starting formal teaching session, e.g. movement to music or gentle warm-up exercises. Short listening and remembering games can also be effective e.g. Kim's game, memory games, copying sequence of actions, sound lottos.
* Movement breaks: Provide opportunities for the child to get up and move around after each activity or when you notice they are distractible e.g. run errands, collect & carry books or distribute worksheets. Movement helps to recharge and gives the body a rest as it can be more tiring to sit still for long periods.
* Incorporate movement into their learning e.g. Let the children take turns to write on the whiteboard before writing on paper. The large movement of trunk, shoulders and arms will facilitate the posture, control and feedback necessary for fine motor tasks.
* If possible schedule activities in such a way so periods of sitting are alternated with periods of movement. Activities that require fairly intense concentration (reading, maths, language) should ideally be followed with P.E, break or other games/physical activities.
* Try using visual timers to give a beginning and end to activities and to help the child to increase the amount of time they are able to focus for. Sand timers tend to be effective and can be purchased in different time intervals.

SEATING:

* Make sure the size of the chair and table are suitable. The child should sit with their feet firmly on the floor and their bottom at the back of the chair. The table height should be just above the elbow crease to allow them to rest their elbows comfortably on the table.
* Some children use fidgeting and rocking movements as a means to organise their attention. It is 'positive' to the child. A move n' sit cushion may be tried to allow this movement while the child is sitting and help them to focus their attention.
* A weighted 'Lap Snake' can be useful to help a child focus their attention. A 'Lap Snake' is a long, heavy beanbag that can be placed across the child's lap when sitting. This provides calming sensory input and may help the child to sit for longer periods. You can try a commercially available beanbag/ wheat packs.
* Children who are easily distracted should be seated in the quietest part of the

classroom, away from noise, bulletin boards and so on. It may also be useful to sit them near the teacher.

* Be aware of the eye-movement control and visual field defects of the child in relation to the seating position in the classroom.
* Remove all materials that are not required for completion of the task from the child's table and work area to reduce distractions.
* Provide the child with a specific time for completing each task. If necessary, use a sand timer as a visual reminder.
* Children, who move a lot, swing their legs or rock on their chair may benefit from theraband tied around the legs of their chair. See below image.

VERBAL INSTRUCTIONS:

* Make sure children are attending to you before speaking. You may have to wait until they finish what they are doing or interrupt them. It is often difficult to listen and do something else at the same time. Try using a 'listening hands position' e.g. ask them to put one hand on top of another on the desk top when listening to instructions. Get them to repeat instructions if appropriate.
* Give one instruction at a time to begin with and several short tasks rather than one long one. As the child becomes able to follow one-step instructions, go to two-step instructions, then three-step and so on. Some children have difficulty listening to verbal instructions. Help them by writing step by step instructions down and letting them tick off each step as they have completed it.
* Children who learn more easily by using their vision may learn best from using words, pictures or diagrams.
* Use simple language when teaching new concepts. Demonstrate as much as possible while explaining verbally.
* If children have difficulty following directions, ask them to repeat instructions in their own words.
* Fiddle toys: Provide a stress/squeeze ball for your child to manipulate whilst he/she is listening. This helps him/her to focus on auditory information.
* Give lots of positive reinforcement when the child completes the task, as well as during the activity.
* Small group activities may assist, where the child has a responsibility to complete part of the group activity. The other children may help the child stay on task.

Let us know if you have any questions!