

LISTENING DIFFICULTIES IN CHILDREN

Some children, who can hear soft sounds normally, have difficulty processing and understanding speech in everyday circumstances. These children may appear not to hear or to lack concentration. Parents often say they have “selective hearing”. These children may easily get frustrated, and while some seem to withdraw, others can become angry or unco-operative. When listening difficulties are suspected in a child, parents and caregivers can usually help the child to understand and to learn better.

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP CHILDREN WITH LISTENING DIFFICULTIES

- ❖ Alert them to listen before beginning the message.
- ❖ Use short, grammatically simple sentences for instructions.
- ❖ Give them time to process each sentence, before they listen to the next.
- ❖ Check that important instructions have been understood.
- ❖ For critical communication, watch the child's face closely. Signs that he/she is not longer following may be observed, and show that the limit has been exceeded. Then the speaker should stop, reorganise the message into smaller units, and begin again.
- ❖ Establish and follow set routines. This reduces the need for frequent instructions. Routines will help them to fit in better with the group.
- ❖ If writing or spelling are causing significant problems, a ‘chunking’ or syllabification approach may help. Divide the word up, so that each part contains only three or four phonemes.
- ❖ When the child is reading, encourage him/her to ‘chunk’ information into short meaningful units with pauses between them.

The ability to process language into meaning matures over many years. Overloading the child with language does not make it grow faster. Overloading the child with language can have a negative effect on self-esteem.

Also remember: Many children with normal or superior intelligence have listening problems. Some children can talk much better than they can listen. Children with listening problems lack confidence in their ability to understand what people say, and this can affect their behaviour in many different ways.

Department of Audiology

Some children have difficulty hearing instructions or explanations in moderately noisy situations (eg. In a typical classroom, in cars or in traffic noise, in the playground or swimming pool). This occurs even though their hearing is normal in quiet situations. This is usually unrecognised, and often causes them to be labelled “inattentive”, “distractible”, or as having “poor concentration”. Listening is more difficult and tiring for them than their parents or teachers realise; they may tire more easily or show other signs of stress.

Suggested STRATEGIES which can improve the capacity to follow verbal instructions in a noisy environment include:

- ❖ They should sit close to the teacher’s usual teaching position (so that the teacher’s voice is relatively louder than the background sounds).
- ❖ Secure their attention before giving instructions.
- ❖ Check that key instructions have been understood. Remember that children with listening difficulties often say, “yes” even when they have *not* understood.
- ❖ Reduce noise to a minimum a times when accurate listening is critical.
- ❖ Background noise in the classroom should be reduced as much as possible. This can be done by increasing soft sound-absorbing surfaces, and by keeping windows and doors to noisy areas closed. Minimize the movement of people and furniture during listening times.
- ❖ Monitor the child’s interactions in difficult listening situations (they may misunderstand what the other children are saying).

Encourage the child to develop some compensating behaviours such as:

- ❖ Watching the speaker’s face
- ❖ Moving closer to the speaker
- ❖ Asking for clarification of messages or for repeats (and preferably in a manner that makes others cooperative).

*It is important to be sure that the child has adequate hearing.
If you have any concerns about hearing, an assessment by an Audiologist is recommended.*