



# WHAT IS AN AUDITORY PROCESSING DELAY?

## BY ELIZABETH HAUGHTON

Often times there are no seemingly understandable reasons why children have difficulty learning to read, why they act out in school, or why they seem distracted or disorientated. Many parents tell me their children can't remember spelling words they just reviewed together two days ago. Others tell me their children can't follow a set of directions, they confuse words, or they can't sound out words. And still other parents tell me when loud noises occur, their children cover their ears. It is important to understand these children could be suffering from an auditory processing delay.

There are two main areas of the auditory processing system which generally cause difficulties for children and adults. The first area includes the brain processing what it hears. An auditory processing delay "scrambles" information which can result in distraction, confusion and frustration. It is not related to the acuity of the ear. Children and adults who have this delay actually hear fine; thus when they go in for testing, it appears as if this is a temporary condition, something they might outgrow. Actually, the older the person gets, the harder it is to go back and close the gaps. Adults very often have severe emotional issues once they realize the impact of what they've lived with and had to go through to either finish school or to get a job.

The second area in the auditory processing system, which can cause difficulty, is the way children and adults use the sound structure of our language. This results in the inability of children to be able to rhyme words, and/or to blend or segment sounds in words; otherwise known as phonemic awareness. They actually have gaps in understanding and using the code of the English language. Parents often think their children are lazy or not motivated. Professionals sometimes recommend therapy or label them dyslexic. Research is clear that in-depth training in the auditory processing system is needed so they can read and spell to their potential.

Auditory processing skills are a part of the language development process that occurs during infancy and childhood. Delays in these skills are a result of a neurophysiologic problem that causes gaps between a person's performance and their potential. Research also tells us about one-third of our population has difficulty in their auditory processing system to one degree or another.

Some of the classic symptoms of persons with auditory processing delays include the following:

- difficulty in reading and spelling
- easily distracted
- slow to respond to auditory information
- often asks "what?" - reluctance to read aloud
- poor word attack skills for words that are unfamiliar
- focuses so much on decoding words that the meaning is lost
- looks around for visual cues
- confuses words or directions
- has trouble working independently
- difficulty telling the difference between words that sound familiar
- difficulty in remembering songs, stories or names
- difficulty associating letters with sounds
- guesses at unknown words in an irrational way

Persons with difficulty in the auditory system need to find a specialist in this area. Much research and fine programs are available to help people pinpoint the problem, understand what needs to be done and to follow through so they can spend their time and energy enjoying learning. If you know of someone who is struggling in this area, please encourage him or her to get help.

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