

# Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)

## What is auditory processing disorder?

Auditory processing disorder (APD) affects a person's ability to understand auditory information (i.e., sounds, including spoken words). People who have APD do not have impaired hearing; rather, their brain is unable to process sounds in the normal way.

It is quite common for people with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD or autism to also experience auditory processing difficulties.

## Potential challenges and difficulties

People with APD may experience the following difficulties:

- Hearing speech clearly over background noise
- Hearing poor quality sounds (for example, when having a conversation over mobile phone or in an echoey room)
- Picking out one voice from others
- Identifying where a voice or sound is coming from
- Hearing speakers clearly from a distance
- Listening selectively to one side or the other when receiving auditory inputs to both ears at the same time
- Distinguishing similar sounds, for example, they may hear 'seventy' and 'seventeen' as the same sound
- Following spoken instructions, particularly multistep instructions
- Understanding and remembering information, instructions or messages given verbally
- Maintaining attention and concentration when listening to someone speaking
- Struggling to express things verbally
- Reading, spelling or other academic activity may also be affected.



## Helpful tips for supporting someone with APD at work

Whether you have an employee, colleague or customer with APD, there are some simple things you can do to make their life easier and support them with some of the key areas they may struggle with.

### Communication and delivering verbal information or instructions

- Get their attention before you start talking and ensure you face them when speaking
- Speak clearly and slowly – avoid complex phrasing and vocabulary
- Avoid covering your mouth when speaking
- Allow time for them to process the information - only rephrase or explain information in a different way if they request you to do so
- Use emphasis to highlight the key points
- Write down information that is extremely important, such as directions, phone numbers or schedules
- Break down the information you are presenting into small, manageable chunks.



### Work environment

- If practical, try to choose a room with good acoustics for meetings - rooms with carpets, soft furnishings, heavy curtains and acoustic ceiling tiles are less echoey and will make it easier for them to hear and process any information being delivered
- Allocate a quiet area for them to work in and minimise background noise as much as possible.
- If possible, switch off air conditioning, shut doors and windows and ask colleagues to keep noise to a minimum when delivering instructions or information verbally or when working on projects where team discussion is required

## Meetings and training

- Allow them to sit as close as possible to the person chairing the meeting or delivering the training
- Write down key points, information and instructions - handouts or bullet points on a whiteboard can be very helpful
- Use visual cues, such as graphics and gestures, and utilise mind maps
- Make sure you look at them when speaking to them
- Check their understanding - ask questions or ask them to explain the task to check they have understood the instructions given
- Encourage them to indicate and seek clarification when they have not understood something
- Be clear in your communication and allow time for them to process the information - only rephrase or explain information in a different way if they request you to do so
- Allow plenty of breaks
- Be supportive and encouraging
- Give instructions when it is quiet, ideally before and not during an activity
- Buddy them up with a colleague and choose pair work rather than individual exercises.

### It can also help to remind them of the below self-help tips:

- When talking to someone, particularly in a crowded room, they should:
  - » position themselves directly in front of the person who is speaking so that they can give them their full attention
  - » concentrate on keywords
  - » watch the speaker's gestures and facial expressions closely
- They should try to arrive early for meetings or training sessions so that they can position themselves as close as possible to the chair, speaker or trainer
- When having a conversation over the phone, they should hold the receiver as close to their ear as possible or ensure their soft-phone headset fits snugly – it should be tight enough so that it covers the ear(s) and keeps out other sounds.

**Remember, the individual is the expert in their condition – if in doubt, check with them!**