

Supporting Auditory Memory and Language Processing Difficulties

Auditory memory is the ability to “take in”, process and retain what is said and then recall it. It is how we remember and process information that we hear. Auditory memory involves the skills of attending, listening, processing, storing, and recalling and difficulties with auditory memory can have an impact on both short term and working memory.

Auditory memory is crucial for language development. Like many language skills, memory skills develop as a child gets older, however some children may find it more difficult than others and need some extra help.

Auditory memory relies on collaboration with other areas of memory including short term and working memory. It is closely linked with attention and listening. A child needs to be able to attend to spoken information in order to be able to understand and remember it.

A child who has difficulties with auditory memory may find it difficult to follow instructions such as ‘go upstairs and get your jumper, socks and shoes’.

Identifying children who have difficulties with auditory memory

Children who have difficulties with their auditory memory may have difficulties with:

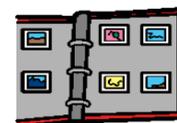
- Attention and listening – they may be easily distracted and struggle to stay on task. This is often more apparent than the memory difficulties themselves.
- Switching their focus or attention e.g. from listening to the teacher, to what is on the board, to their written task
- Completing tasks – they may lose their place and struggle to get back on track with what they were asked to do or they may give up easily on tasks
- Following long or complex instructions
- Linking and relating new information to prior knowledge
- Telling stories or telling you what happened in school



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How you can help in the classroom environment:

Be aware of the **environment** e.g. sitting next to a humming computer or a window which could be distracting? Distractions, both auditory and visual, can lead to information being lost.



Avoid overloading

- 'Chunk' information and instructions into shorter, more manageable amounts. Too much information can lead to overload, and then information will be lost.
- Get attention first.
- Try to avoid giving new information while a child is still processing.
- Repeat whole-class instructions individually.
- Pre-teach vocabulary before topic-specific lessons to reduce processing demands.
- Highlight key vocabulary at the start of each lesson for the child to 'look out' for to keep them on task
- Summarise the key points at the end of the lesson. Knowing this will happen can be reassuring, and reduce distraction through anxiety.

Use visual supports

- Use visual images to support verbal information. This is not just pictures – think about colours for example, or the pattern of how things are laid out.
- Write down information / task instructions for the child to refer back to.
- Provide handouts to reduce the amount of information that they need to recall.

Organisational strategies

- Use task-planners to help the child concentrate on new information.
- Try to keep parts of activities to a structured routine to reduce processing demand.

Specific strategies for the child to use:

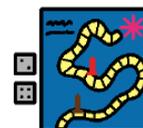
Remember that a strategy that helps you may not be the one that works best for a child with specific auditory memory difficulties. Try different strategies and see what works best for them. Encourage them to practice and offer reminders to use the best strategies in different situations.

- **Visualising** – encourage the child to visualise an image to go with specific vocabulary in their head to help them remember lists of items. Close your eyes, can you still see it?
- **Repetition** – ask the child to repeat and rehearse information or instructions themselves. Start by encouraging the child to repeat aloud and when they have had practice with this, encourage them to start repeating in their head.
- **Note-taking** – encourage the child to draw (for younger children) or write (for older children) some key points, information or vocabulary to help them with processing.
- Support the child to recognise when they haven't retained the information, and support ways of **asking for help**.



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Games and activities to help build auditory memory skills



- Barrier games
 - Put a barrier between you and the child and ask them to follow instructions e.g. 'draw a red circle and then a green square' or using Lego, 'put the long red brick on top of the green and blue bricks.'
 - Gradually increase the length of the instructions

- Treasure hunt
 - The child can collect prizes / tokens, giving clues such as 'check behind the sofa and then under the table'

- Simon Says
 - Make it more difficult by giving more than one instruction at a time e.g. 'Simon says touch your head and then jump up and down'.

- Expanding Sentences
 - One person starts with a short part of a sentence and then each person takes it in turns to add on an extra part e.g.
 - I went to the park
 - I went to the park on Sunday
 - I went to the park on Sunday and played football
 - I went to the park on Sunday and played football with my friend

- Phone messages
 - Taking it in turns to 'answer the phone', listen to the message and tell it to another person in the group.

- Memory games
 - e.g. 'I went shopping and I bought...', asking them to remember each item that is added on.

References:

Elks, L. & McLachlan, H. (2015) *Secondary Language Builders*, Elkan

Loraine, S. S. Johnson, C. M. (2011) *Helpful Strategies for Auditory Memory*, Handy Handouts, Number 133