

UNDERSTANDING AUDITORY PROCESSING DISORDER/APD

More awareness is needed for Auditory Processing Disorder and its effects on the everyday lives of those living with the condition.

The voluntary organisation APD Support UK is urging people across all walks of life, whether parents and individuals, medical and educational professionals or employers, to learn more about a condition known as Auditory Processing Disorder/APD. This condition has wide-ranging effects on all aspects of life, throughout life. APD Support UK is the only organisation in the UK and internationally dedicated to supporting those affected by this condition. APD Support UK brings parents and professionals together to provide support for sufferers and their families, raise awareness and understanding of APD, campaign for specialised UK-wide diagnosis, and dispel the myths surrounding the condition.

APD is believed to affect as many as 10% of children worldwide (40% if those children also have learning disabilities) and is thought to exist in over 20% of adults. All individuals with Autism are believed to have auditory processing deficits in some measure. APD is *far* more prevalent than Autism (which affects only 1.1% of children in the UK according to the World Health Organisation /WHO) yet it is far less well-known or supported.

APD is a medical condition that affects the way that the brain processes what is heard. APD can be inherited/congenital (primary APD) and there are many other suspected causes at any stage of life (secondary APD). APD is not the same as hearing loss: it can occur in people with perfect hearing as well as those with hearing loss. However, it should be considered a hearing impairment and is recognised as such by WHO in their latest "Report on Hearing"). This is because those with the condition cannot understand what is heard due to the brain not efficiently processing sound and speech. Without the input of the brain, what we hear is just unintelligible noise. With that in mind, APD is considered to be neurological in origin, but it can only be officially

diagnosed by a consultant in audiovestibular medicine, in person, using specialised testing.

APD can present itself in many ways, and each individual is uniquely affected. APD also never exists in isolation: other co-existing conditions can compound its effects, and these will also need full support. Although APD meets the criteria of a disability in the UK for many sufferers (depending on its severity and the impact of other conditions).

APD is classed as an “invisible disability” but it is not a “learning disability” and it does not affect intelligence; it can also exist in gifted individuals. Someone with difficulties that affect learning who is also gifted is known as having “dual exceptionalities” and both aspects need full support. APD can greatly affect communication, so it can adversely affect learning because a child with APD cannot efficiently or consistently process or understand what is being taught (and APD is random in its effects). Effective verbal communication is vital to all aspects of life. Therefore, APD can have a lifelong impact on education, work, and relationships due to misunderstanding or mis-processing speech. Coping with APD can also lead to anxiety and stress, even in very young children, and this can have lasting effects on self-esteem and confidence. If missed, or not fully supported, APD and the other issues that it causes can have far-reaching, persisting and sometimes devastating consequences, whether congenital, or late-onset.

Alyson Mountjoy is the founder and Chair of APD Support UK. She is also the parent of a young adult with APD and other difficulties, author of two books on APD, and has over 20 years’ experience in supporting families and individuals with this condition. Alyson said:

“APD cannot be cured and the consensus among specialists is that there are currently no effective therapies with lasting effects. Children with APD will become adults with

APD and will need lifelong support, acceptance and understanding. But first, they need access to accurate diagnosis. APD Support UK advocates full testing for all individuals suspected of having APD (as opposed to basic screening), yet there is still just a handful of NHS testing centres in England that provide full testing, with only one in Wales, and none in Scotland or Northern Ireland. Waiting lists for these centres are growing, so children and adults are often left to seek diagnosis privately, and private centres that provide full testing are also few. Children with APD need help to develop coping strategies and self-advocacy skills, but they also need and deserve recognition of their APD, and acceptance.

Worryingly, few medical and education professionals even know about APD and, despite WHO recognition, some still fail to believe it exists and choose screening over a well-established testing protocol that has been available and used successfully since 2002. With appropriate and adequate support provided in education and at work (which is a legal obligation), individuals with APD can learn to manage its effects, get around it, and look forward to a brighter future. We can all help by understanding APD and spreading awareness of this disabling, lifelong condition.”

For more information on diagnosis and management, links to the APD Support UK Facebook group for parents, adults who have APD or suspect it, please visit <http://apdsupportuk.yolasite.com>