

Adults with Auditory Processing Disorder/APD - and how to help

Problems, explanations, solutions

Adults with APD need people to understand what APD is and what it means to cope with APD in everyday terms throughout a person's life, at home at work and in adult education.

- They cannot help having APD and need your support and acceptance for who they are.
- They need this support from families, partners and friends -so that they do not feel isolated.
- They need this from employers and colleagues in the workplace - so that they can earn a living and pursue a career.
- They need this in adult education - to help them gain the qualifications they missed out on before they realised APD existed and no help was available, or to help them re-train to gain employment in more vocational or APD friendly occupations.

Listed below are problems that adults with APD may have to deal with. Not all of them will have all of the problems, but these are just the most common ones- there may be more – everyone with APD is affected differently. In each case:

- A. Describes what the problems are.
- B. Gives an explanation of how the problems affect adults with APD, in everyday terms.
- C. Offers possible solutions, ways in which those without APD (such as friends, family, partners, tutors, colleagues, employers etc.) can help them to cope with their APD.

Some of the problems experienced by adults with APD every day are:

- A. Problems with understanding speech in background noise.
 - B. The competing noise makes it hard to distinguish what they should be listening to and to derive meaning from it, especially when processing is random.
 - C. Look at the person with APD when you speak to them (many lip-read) and hold conversations somewhere quiet whenever possible. For meetings provide written material beforehand and take notes for the person with APD.
- A. Appearing not to hear at all when you speak or having a delayed response or reply.
 - B. Inattention, inability to listen; thought of as a daydreamer or selective listener, may often appear in a world of their own - this indicates that a person has not understood all or part of what you said. It is because of the distraction of background noise affecting their already diminished ability to process what they hear. Visual distractions make this worse too. Due to the isolation of trying to cope with sound those with APD may sometimes seem to switch off or tune out (epilepsy should also be investigated if this is the case as symptoms can be similar).
 - C. Again, understanding is vital, this is not meant as bad manners or avoidance. Ask the person with APD if they prefer repetition of what is said or rewording it, or maybe if they cannot process well at that time, neither will help so write it down. Keep workplaces free from distractions.

- A. Adults with APD might speak louder or quieter than normal, unaware of the volume.
 - B. Caused by an inability to register the volume of their own speech and inability to self-regulate the volume.
 - C. Please be understanding; this is not meant deliberately to indicate either aggression or shyness; the person simply cannot help it and probably won't know they are doing it. A gentle reminder will help.
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- A. Problems with telephones and people with strong accents or rapid speech.
 - B. Caused by poor telephone sound quality, sound distortion, unfamiliar voices etc. Unfamiliar accents and those who speak too quickly make it harder for everyone to understand what is said, but this is worse for those who have problems processing speech anyway.
 - C. If this is a problem, use other forms of communication with the adult with APD, such as email, texting or other written means wherever possible or speak clearly and slowly, allowing the listener extra time to process what you say. Using the phone should ideally be avoided, but when it is essential, calls taken in a quiet environment if at all possible, especially at work.
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- A. Inability to follow multi-step instructions.
 - B. This is because of auditory sequencing difficulties.
 - C. Give instructions on paper or one at a time, ensuring understanding of each point as you go along.
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- A. Avoidance of noisy crowded places and social gatherings.
 - B. This is not due to attempts to be anti-social, but a necessary side-effect for those who cannot process speech in background noise, which can become very unpleasant, exhausting and overwhelming. Those with APD can be as outgoing as anyone else, but are socially isolated by their processing difficulty.
 - C. Don't take this personally; choose quieter settings for social gatherings. Crowded shops and those that play music (also loud restaurants and bars with music) should also be avoided.
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- A. Misinterpretation of meaning of words; word retrieval problems (not finding the right words to say); missing inferences, may not understand sarcasm or humour.
 - B. These can all be causes of miscommunication which can be very frustrating and also embarrassing for the person with APD. Some people with APD also stutter or stammer - when trying to find the right words to express themselves, or when stressed.
 - C. Be patient and explain discretely what has been misunderstood; allow the person time to process what you say and find the words that they need to respond to you.
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- A. APD can make people appear lazy or stupid or anti-social.
 - B. APD has nothing to do with intelligence, attitude or effort; those with APD have to try twice as hard just to survive and need help not criticism. Processing can be worse when tired, stressed or unwell.
 - C. Understanding, patience and acceptance can help so much with all of this. Also vital is to avoid putting added pressure on the person with APD to be what they are not, as this can add more stress and make their processing worse. APD can put a strain on personal and professional relationships, but with the right support, these relationship and communication problems can be overcome.

- A. In some people APD can cause problems with reading and/or spelling.
 - B. APD is thought to be one of the major causes of dyslexia, due to the inability to process the sounds that make up words, which can prevent sufferers from relating these to the written form of language. Speech can also be affected.
 - C. Use of spellcheckers and assistive reading technology can help here.
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- A. People with APD need to develop their own personal coping strategies such as lip-reading and establishing familiar routines and their own way of doing things, just so that they can cope every day. Many people do this naturally, from childhood, whether or not they have been diagnosed with APD.
 - B. They need such coping strategies as routines because when facing so much in life they cannot understand or control, they try as much as possible to control what they are able to. It is essential for those close to them to understand this need for predictability in, what is for them, an unpredictable world, and to help them to maintain this sameness and security.
 - C. Go along with them as much as possible; if you find their routines restrictive talk about this calmly to them and come to a compromise.

REMEMBER: APD is for life.

It cannot be cured and by the time the sufferer reaches adulthood, there is normally no way to improve it. They may have poor self-esteem, anxiety and/or depression. They will need your help to get over these things.

If you care about the person with APD, don't expect them to behave as if they didn't have it or try to change them; accept that they will always be as they are, with all the added sensitivities and unique gifts that this condition can bring with it – and with the right support, you can help them to be all that they can be.

N.B. This information sheet is provided by APDUK as part of an ongoing APDUK initiative in the development of informational hand-outs for adults with APD, covering the difficulties faced in the areas of employment, inter-personal relationships and post-16 and adult education.

This initiative is part of the Adults with APD Research Project in conjunction with Damien Howard, <http://www.eartroubles.com/>

For further information, please visit APD Support UK <http://apdsupportuk.yolasite.com/>