

Managing APD at School

NB - These suggestions are general and, although they will go some way to helping children and young people minimise the effects of their APD, it is vital to take into account:

- *How APD is likely to impact on a particular individual at school (based on diagnostic findings).*
- *The acoustic environment of the school, teaching and learning styles.*
- *Listening requirements in different lessons/situations/teaching rooms. In other words, real life listening demands rather than theoretical ones.*
- *The young person's perspective of their difficulties – what helps most? What is unhelpful?*
- *Social and emotional challenges.*

This can be achieved through observation, acoustic 'audits' of different areas of the school and discussions with teachers, support staff and the young person. In this way a plan, prepared (where possible) in partnership with the young person, can provide a concise, practical, tailored and therefore more useful working document, which should be made easily accessible to all teaching and support staff.

Nursery to Primary

- Arrange awareness training so that all staff understand the impact of APD on learning and know how to help.
- Maintain close home/school links.
- If provided, ensure at least one person on the staff knows how to manage, maintain, monitor and evaluate the assistive listening device.
- Make sure the child is aware of changes in routine, since throw away comments – a different activity, room change or special event for example – may be missed.
- Provide a summary of upcoming topics – with a glossary of new vocabulary so that the child can be prepared at home. This should be a key strategy in individual learning plans and will become even more important as the child moves through school and the pace of lessons increases.
- Consider carefully the best place for the child to sit in different learning situations; Carpet time? Assemblies? Group work? Whole class?
- Make sure the light is on you, not behind you, so that the child has the clearest possible view of your face.
- Say who is speaking and repeat the answers given by other pupils in discussions.

- Keep background noise to a minimum – close the door, encourage other pupils to understand when noise levels are too high. Reverberant rooms make listening accurately difficult for *all* pupils. Rooms with many windows, the hall and gym are all examples of challenging listening spaces. Seek advice on how to improve listening conditions for all pupils (see BSA documents <https://www.thebsa.org.uk/bsa-groups/group-apdi/> and other handouts in the APD ‘Mesh’ Guide).
- Assemblies at school: If a sound system is available in the hall, ask whoever is taking assembly to wear a microphone. This benefits all.
- Allow quiet ‘listening to one person’ times – sharing a book, sharing a game.
- For the very young, focus attention on environmental and nature sounds when out on a walk – splashing water on a pond, birdsong, the noise a bus makes etc.
- Music – listening to it, making it. ‘Fine tune’ listening skills by picking out different instruments in the orchestra: for example, ‘My First Orchestra’ comes with an audio CD and is very good. Similar children’s guides to the orchestra are available.

Additional Suggestions for Years 5, 6 and Beyond

- Re-assure and let the young person know that you understand their problems and that you will work together to overcome them.
- Providing a summary of upcoming vocabulary, glossaries of new terms and topics to prepare at home, now becomes essential, as the student with APD will need to adapt to different teachers/accents/styles/learning spaces etc. Preparation will help reduce feelings of always being in ‘catch up’ mode – or worse, failure - and will increase confidence.
- If school does not use an in-house secure web based system (where pupils can review lessons and topics at home) then perhaps staff would be prepared to allow the student to copy lesson notes and power-point presentations onto a designated USB for review in quiet at home. This will also be an invaluable revision tool for tests and examinations.
- Discuss with the student (discreetly) the best place to sit in each lesson. It is often best to be near to the teacher but also, if possible, in a position where it is easy to ‘swivel’ to see the other pupils. This will facilitate lip reading and other visual clues to support understanding of the spoken word. At the front and to the side is ideal. In the middle of a row, it is difficult (and too awkward) to turn around, locate the speaker and “see’ what others are saying.
- Try to stand in one place when introducing and explaining the lesson; it is difficult to follow what you say if you move around the room.
- Indicate who is speaking and repeat the answers given by other students in discussions.

- Make sure homework tasks are copied accurately. Check understanding.
- Older students find the use of a tablet to record practical demonstrations - in science, for example. A tablet can also be used to organise daily commitments, schedule work and develop independence. If information on the tablet can be synched to a home computer, it will be much easier to order and plan work.
- Some find it easier to listen to audio presentations (mental maths, modern foreign languages, stories etc.) through personal headphones.
- Later on, noise-cancelling headphones during tests or when concentrating on independent work might be useful in the short term. Filtering out unwanted noise is a skill that will hopefully develop over time.
- Spelling Tests and Mental Maths. It is important to test ability, NOT processing speed. Tests should therefore be delivered 'live' (to provide facial clues) wherever possible and extra time given if necessary.
- Public Examinations: students with an APD diagnosis *may* qualify for extra time, but it must be proven to be necessary. Assessments for processing speed are usually already part of the school SEN toolkit – used for other students with, for example, dyslexia.
- Multimedia: Use captions when showing video/DVDs wherever possible – this is particularly important for animations. Be aware that the student may miss what you say if the lights are low. Ensure that any background 'humming' noise is not coming from computers, projectors or lighting.
- Listening to music, learning an instrument and singing are good for auditory training. Singing in a choir or playing in an orchestra are often as effective (and possibly more fun) than 'auditory training' apps and interventions.
- Similarly, drama classes (in or out of school) develop confidence, enhance listening, learning, memory, speech and expressive language skills in a natural and evolving way.
- Children with APD often become anxious – particularly when under pressure. Teach 'breathing' techniques to reduce anxiety. Yoga, meditation or T'ai Chi classes are also good for this.
- Remember that, for the student with APD, sustained listening is very tiring and 'time out' in a quiet place during the school day may be necessary.
- Offer the option of eating lunch in a quiet room with a friend or two. School dining halls offer notoriously appalling listening conditions and may cause additional distress.
- Make sure the young person becomes an equal partner in deciding the most useful interventions and support for THEM. Encourage the student to have ownership of their difficulties and to become proactive in their learning needs. This will be a vital skill for university and beyond.