The Neurodivergent Classroom

Auditory processing disorder (APD) at a Glance



APD means the brain has trouble making sense of what is heard. In noise or with several people talking, understanding gets harder, even though a standard hearing test comes back normal.

What you may notice in class

- Background noise makes speech hard to follow.
- They miss parts of multi-step spoken instructions.
- They often ask questions or ask you to repeat.
- Similar-sounding words or sounds get mixed up.
- Notes on the board, written notes or eye contact help.
- Long stretches of listening are exhausting.
- Key words make instructions easier to follow.
- Younger kids struggle more with noise, rhymes and new instructions. (elementary school)
- Older students find lectures, discussions and juggling several sources especially demanding. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Can show what they know despite listening barriers.
- Picks up key information well from written key words.
- Uses visuals as an extra way in.
- Can tell you what works for them.
- Their understanding shows once listening isn't the only route.

What helps

- Get their attention first, then talk in short chunks.
- Write key words and steps where everyone can see them.
- Break up multi-step instructions and pause in between.
- Check understanding with an open question.
- In groups, keep it to one voice at a time.
- Cut background noise and echo where you can.
- Offer captions, a transcript or written key terms.
- Give time to process before you repeat.
- Offer a seat where they can hear and see well.
- With younger kids, use pictures, key words and short spoken chunks. (elementary school)
- With older students, hand out transcripts, outlines and written summaries. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- Repeating it louder or faster instead of explaining it another way.
- Blaming effort when the real barrier is noise.
- Treating one tool as the answer for everyone.
- Assuming louder means better understood.

Words that carry

"I'll write the key steps on the board."

"Take a moment before you answer."

"What works best for you right now?"

"Look, the key words are right next to the explanation." (elementary school)

"Here's the outline, so you can go back over it later." (middle and high school)

Where to find support

ASHA: Understanding APD in children
asha.org/public/hearing/understanding-auditory-processing-disorders-in-children
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, plain-language overview.

British Society of Audiology: APD group thebsa.org.uk/special-interest-groups/auditory-processing-disorder-interest-group
UK professional body with guidance on APD.

Local support
An audiologist or speech-language pathologist in your country can evaluate and advise. Ask your school's special education team.

More in the Teacher Portal: neurodivergentclassroom.com/teacher-portal/auditory-processing/

Sources: ASHA: Central Auditory Processing Disorder, Practice Portal · British Society of Audiology: Position Statement and Practice Guidance, APD · ASHA: Classroom acoustics · DGPP: S1 guideline on auditory processing disorders (in German)