



Auditory Processing vs. Hearing Loss

Both can make listening difficult—but for different reasons.



HEARING LOSS

- ← The ears have difficulty detecting or transmitting sound.
- ← Sounds may be too soft, unclear, or distorted.
- ← Diagnosed via a hearing test by an audiologist. Can be completed with or without participation (ex. evoked potentials are completed usually at 1 day of age).
- ← Hearing aids or other technology may improve access to sound.
- ← It can occur at any age and may be temporary or permanent.



AUDITORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTY

- ← The brain has difficulty making sense of sounds, especially in challenging listening environments.
- ← Sounds may be heard but are difficult to understand or distinguish.
- ← It may be considered when hearing sensitivity is normal but listening difficulties persist.
- ← Diagnosed via an auditory processing evaluation that includes a language and non-language test battery by an audiologist.
- ← Strategies, environmental modifications, and targeted intervention may improve listening skills and function.
- ← It can affect children or adults and occurs with otherwise normal hearing. (Cannot be accurately diagnosed with hearing loss).
- ← It is typically treated by a speech language therapist, though audiologists may do this.
- ← Testing is normative based rather than pass/fail or percentages. At this time, most tests are available for 6-7 years of age and older.

WHAT MIGHT IT SOUND LIKE?

Someone with hearing loss may say:

- ← “Everyone sounds too quiet.”
- ← “I need the volume turned up.”
- ← “I can hear you, but I can’t hear you clearly.”
- ← “I do better when I can see the person speaking.”

Someone with auditory processing difficulty may say:

- ← “I can hear you, but I don’t understand what you’re saying.”
- ← “I have trouble following conversations when there is background noise.”
- ← “People seem to mumble, even though I know they aren’t.”
- ← “I need people to repeat themselves, especially in groups.”
- ← “I have trouble following rapid speech or multiple-step directions.”

A simple way to think about it:

Hearing loss: The sound is not being heard clearly

Auditory processing difficulty: The sound is heard, but the brain has difficulty interpreting or organizing it.