



But He's an Angel at Home

From time to time a situation comes along where a child surfaces with behaviour problems at daycare or school, yet at home is an angel. As the problem at daycare or school continues there is disbelief by the teachers that the child is an angel at home. The teachers may begin to suspect the parent is defensive, lying or even that home life is the source of the problem. There is talk of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and suggestions for medication or counseling.

Upon further exploration it appears that the behaviour issues arise more at free or unstructured time; when there are multiple or concurrent activities and noise; and when the child may be fatigued.

The medical history of the child reveals multiple occurrences of earaches with trips to the doctor and prescriptions for antibiotics. The earaches occurred significantly between the ages of 12 to 36 months.

Under these circumstances, it may be that this child has an Auditory Processing Disorder, the result of hearing loss during the period of multiple earaches. To be clear, hearing deficits and auditory processing deficits are two distinct and separate disorders which can co-occur or occur separately.

As a child get an earache, fluid builds in the middle ear blocking sound. The child goes to the doctor and obtains an anti-biotic. With medication, the earache pain subsides, often within 24 to 48 hours. However, it can take up to several weeks for the fluid to clear. Thus hearing remains obstructed. With children who experience multiple earaches, the fluid may remain in place for months at a time. This results in an ongoing hearing loss during the crucial period of language and information processing development.

Even if hearing is restored, which usually happens as the child ages, the lack of hearing during the period of language and information processing development can cause impaired higher order language functions. Hence the child now hears, but may not understand the language properly, may have speech difficulties and may have trouble with filtering mechanisms to selectively attend.

For children with an Auditory Processing Disorder, it is like being at the midway of a country fair. There is noise all around and it is difficult to concentrate. Most kids and adults get used to the noise and within a few minutes can tune it out. However, kids with Auditory Processing Disorder never do get used to the noise, cannot tune it out and hence they cannot figure out which sounds to attend to. The situation remains confusing and distracting.

In the classroom setting, by misbehaving, the child is removed from the situation and they are seen to calm down. However when returned, they act up again and subsequently the time-out or consequence is increased. Over time, the consequences are thought to be ineffective and the child incorrigible. At home there is naturally less going on and hence less distractions and hence a less likelihood of experiencing the problem.

If this sounds like your child's situation, go armed with this article to your doctor and ask for help. To assess, the child should be seen by an audiologist, speech-language pathologist and educational child-psychologist. Your child may be diagnosed with an Auditory Processing Disorder as a result.

Some children require modifications at school. A higher teacher-student ratio and less noisy and distracting setting will help. If behaviour at recess is a problem with the confusion of the playground, then consider alternate activities, such as with small groups and clubs and playing board games.

If your child is diagnosed with Auditory Processing Disorder, follow the recommendations of the assessors and share the recommendations with the daycare or school. It will be important for the child's teachers to understand his or her special needs. With proper diagnosis and guidance, the behaviour should take care of itself.

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