

“I had a five-year old autistic boy in this morning who started speaking his first words. It’s exhilarating for me to be able to help somebody in that way, “says Ros



Unlocking Potential

Using The Listening Program® to Help Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders Improve Auditory Processing.

What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

The way people think about autism has changed in recent years. It is best described as a group of disorders with a similar pattern of behaviour in three key areas - communication, social interaction and imaginative thought.

The currently favoured term is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with the word 'spectrum' used because no two people with an ASD are exactly alike.

As the term suggests, there is no one diagnosis or label. Rather there are several labels that place people at different points on the spectrum. At one end of the spectrum diagnostic labels such as "Asperger Syndrome", "High Functioning Autism" and "Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) and "Sensory Processing Disorder". At the other end of the spectrum you will find labels such as "Autism", "Classic Autism" and "Kanner Autism".

One of the greatest challenges facing parents working towards their child’s recovery is choosing among the many treatment options now available. Which is ‘right’ for their child and confer the most benefit? Do they pursue biomedical treatments, language / communication therapies, educational programs based on behavioural principles, sensory integration, complementary or alternative medicine- or all of the above?

There is no easy answer, especially since children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are each unique, often requiring and individual treatment program. However common to a majority of individuals with ASD is some form of auditory processing disorder. Indeed, auditory processing problems are recognised today as the #1 sensory impairment in children diagnosed with an ASD.

Over the course of the last 15 years, there has been an increasing awareness of auditory-based interventions in the autism community. The real catalyst, however, was the publication, in 1997, of Annabelle Stehli’s book *The Sound of a Miracle: A Child Triumphs Over Autism*, a mother’s account of her daughter Georgi’s success with Auditory Integration Training. This groundbreaking book offered parents a

powerful new possibility: that a child with autism spectrum disorder could be helped – to the point of recovery even – by simply listening to special music through headphones. Since that time, attention to auditory processing difficulties in SAD children has resulted in a new understanding of the degree to which auditory impairments affect a child’s ability to succeed.

The Auditory Channel

Individuals with ASD commonly experience auditory processing dysfunction in the following areas:

- Auditory attention – the ability to attend, focus or listen to something such as a parent’s request to pick up their toys.
- Filtering extraneous sound – being able to ‘tune out’ the sound of the air conditioner in the classroom in order to concentrate on an assignment.
- Sound discrimination – at a more elementary level, being able to distinguish an ‘n’ from an ‘m’; at the more advanced level, being able to distinguish change in voice tone to understand the emotional meaning being conveyed in language.
- Temporal processing – to process the basic elements of language (phonemes) one must be able to perceive the timing of rapidly changing sounds.
- Auditory memory – fundamental skill essential for learning; the ability to receive, store, process, and recall information in a

sequence such as a set of instructions like a homework assignment.

The Listening Program

The Listening Program® (TLP) is a music-based auditory stimulation method. The program is used as a safe and effective method that gently trains the auditory system to process sounds for improved listening, learning, attention, and communication. The program is also used in providing advanced auditory training to the ear and the brain through systematic delivery of psycho-acoustically modified music. According to therapists qualified in the application of the program, areas of commonly reported change include: attention and concentration, listening and auditory processing, speech and language, memory, social skills, reading, sensory processing, self regulation, balance and coordination, vocal performance and musical ability, organization and planning skills, self confidence and motivation.

The programs are generally administered in the home with consultation and monitoring by a trained TLP Provider. They are designed to build the auditory skills an autistic child needs to effectively process sensory information. Consisting of audio CD’s or iPod with bone conduction containing acoustically modified classical music, the program is easily administered at home in just 15 – 30 minutes a day.

To create a permanent change in the brain, sensory stimulation must be delivered with sufficient frequency, intensity and duration.

Five year old Ben diagnosed with Autism, had difficulty with auditory processing. After starting The Listening Program the first changes his mother noticed was that he was using pronouns properly, pronoun reversal had been a problem up until then.

After several days she noticed he became more sensitive to feelings and was more affectionate than usual. He seemed to have better sentence structure and his sentences had more detail. His school teacher noticed that Sam's improved attention to detail and that transitioning became easier for him – an area that had been difficult for Sam.

Isabelle was diagnosed as Autistic Moderately Impaired by the assessment team at the Westmead Hospital following speech behaviour and other regressions the parents started to observe at 28 months. At age 3 she showed additional signs of auditory processing difficulties that lead her parents to The Listening Program.

Isabelle completed approximately 40 hours of listening with The Listening program while still 3 and experienced gains in many areas. Her receptive and expressive language improved. Isabelle went from using limited sign language to speaking in couplets with limited vocabulary. Attention and focus sharpened and she is initiating and completing projects. There is more expression in Isabelle's face and she has better motor coordination. Sleeping patterns have improved, and she is trying and liking more foods. She has also gained in maturity as a result of her improved behaviour. Isabelle's parents are ecstatic and are continuing with her listening program to help maintain and build on those gains.

In order to create a permanent change in the brain, and bring about some of the positive changes described above, sensory stimulation must be delivered with sufficient frequency, intensity and duration.

- TLP is done 5 days per week with 2 days off.
- Listening sessions are typically 15 minutes, once or twice a day.
- Listening times are shortened for those who need less intensity.
- There are options for listening with new stereo speaker version for children not ready to wear headphones.
- CD's and iPod Bone Conduction are available in four treatment categories: Full Spectrum, Sensory Integration, Speech and Language and High Spectrum. Each category systematically addresses a different range of the audible sound spectrum at varying levels of intensity for program individualisation.
- Initial programs are typically 40-60 hours over the course of several months.
- Maintained listening is recommended to sustain and build on gains.

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