



WHEN HEARING

is not the issue...

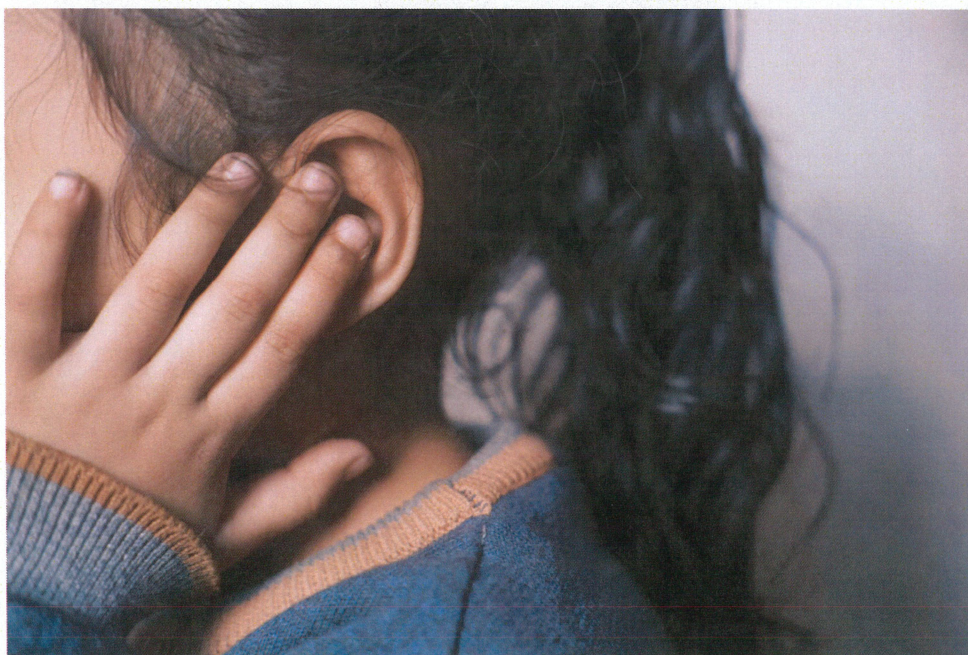
When a gifted child repeatedly asks for information to be repeated, shuts down in a noisy classroom, or returns home exhausted after a day surrounded by many voices, it may be tempting to interpret the response as intensity, sensitivity, or overexcitability. At times, these factors are indeed part of the picture. In other cases, a more specific auditory challenge may be involved.

Central auditory processing disorder (CAPD), also known as auditory processing disorder (APD), does not necessarily concern whether a child can detect sound. A child may pass a

standard hearing test and still struggle to assign meaning to what is heard, follow verbal instructions, or filter out background noise.

This is precisely why CAPD is highly relevant to work with gifted, twice-exceptional, and multi-exceptional children and adolescents. Strong verbal and cognitive abilities may compensate for the difficulties for a considerable period. Conversely, auditory processing difficulties may suppress performance and create an impression of ability below the child's actual potential. What appears externally as inattention, resistance, lack of motivation, or pronounced sensitivity may therefore have several possible explanations.

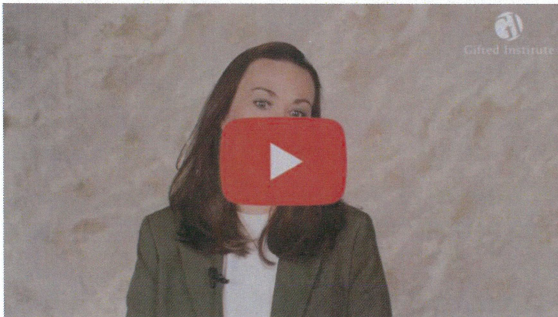
Our collaborators Megan E. Locke and Hilary K. Wisdom of the Able Kids Foundation have written an article on this frequently overlooked intersection. Their article appears below.



WATCH MEGAN OG HILARY ONLINE

From September 1st. through September 30th., you can view an online presentation in which Hilary K. Wisdom and Megan E. Locke examine CAPD and giftedness in depth. The presentation is in English and includes Danish subtitles.

The presentation offers specialized knowledge that can support the recognition of relevant patterns, encourage more precise questions, and clarify why a child with substantial cognitive abilities may still become overwhelmed by sound and verbal information.



Your Ticket Also Helps a Child Attend Camp

Gifted Institute and the Able Kids Foundation have agreed that all proceeds from the lecture will go directly and in full to GI's camp fund. The fund provides full scholarships for children and adolescents who would otherwise be unable to attend camp.

[PURCHASE YOUR TICKET FOR THE PRESENTATION HERE](#)

Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD) and Giftedness: Is Sound Sensitivity Being Overlooked?

By Megan E. Locke, Au.D. and Hilary K. Wisdom, Au.D. | Able Kids Foundation

Gifted individuals are often described as "intense" and/or "emotional." Sounds may bother them more than it seems to bother other kids. They may ask for verbal information to be repeated and they may avoid or become exhausted in noisy classrooms, at birthday parties, or at assemblies. They may also come home from school exhausted. These traits are sometimes contributed to heightened sensitivities or overexcitabilities but for many gifted individuals, their sensitivity to sound may be due to a common, yet often misdiagnosed condition called central auditory processing disorder (CAPD), also called auditory processing disorder (APD).

What Is CAPD?

The auditory system does much more than simply detect sound. It is also responsible for assigning meaning to what we hear and filtering out competing background noise. Some auditory systems perform all three tasks (detect sound, assign meaning to what is heard, and filter out competing noises) with ease. However, for individuals with CAPD, they can pass a standard hearing test and still struggle with the other two tasks. This experience has been described as "auditory chaos" by those who live with CAPD.

A normal hearing test does not rule out CAPD. An individual with CAPD may hear sounds perfectly well but struggle to understand speech in noisy environments, follow verbal instructions, and/or filter out/ignore competing background noise. The result can present as inattention, defiance, or emotional dysregulation, when the underlying cause is an overwhelmed auditory system.

There are several causes of CAPD. CAPD can be genetic. This condition can also be caused by delayed maturation. Research also suggests that a central issue in CAPD lies in the asynchrony between the ears.

Why Giftedness and CAPD Are So Easily Confused

Giftedness is often accompanied by heightened sensory and emotional sensitivities which may be explained by Dabrowski's theory as overexcitabilities. Individuals with overexcitabilities may be easily overstimulated and need a quiet place to retreat from noisy environments. This information is helpful but can also prevent further evaluation and a proper diagnosis of central auditory processing disorder. Gifted individuals with CAPD who are not properly identified may have unfair, and even unrealistic expectations placed upon

them every day. A gifted child who covers their ears at an assembly, who seems to "tune out" mid-instruction, or who is exhausted after a day of group work may be read as gifted and extra sensitive, when the underlying challenge may be an auditory processing difficulty.

CAPD and the Twice-Exceptional (2e) Learner

De Bonte and colleagues (2024) argued that auditory processing disorders remain understudied within the 2e literature, despite being common in this population. One of the main factors that can pose a challenge to properly identifying CAPD in the gifted population is the significant overlap between CAPD and other commonly occurring conditions found in this group including anxiety, attention disorders, autism, dyslexia, sensory processing challenges, and visual processing challenges. Ronksley-Pavia (2024) similarly found that auditory processing challenges in gifted learners are easy to miss because giftedness tends to mask difficulties, rather than reveal an underlying disability.

Alternatively, an undiagnosed central auditory processing disorder can mask giftedness, suppressing testing scores and classroom performance. Gifted adults can experience similar challenges. Many were never evaluated for CAPD as children and may have been inappropriately labeled as too sensitive, distractible, or lazy. Some adults develop compensatory strategies without ever knowing what they were compensating for. Recognizing CAPD patterns in adulthood which include exhaustion after meetings or social gatherings, a need to ask people to repeat themselves, or avoidance of loud environments can be the first step toward a proper diagnosis and support.

Signs That a CAPD Evaluation May Be Warranted

Gifted children often have strong compensatory abilities which can mask CAPD and delay the more obvious signs of this condition for years. If any of the patterns below feel familiar, a formal CAPD evaluation may be worth pursuing.

Sound feels overwhelming. Heightened sensitivity to sound (loud and/or soft) is one of the most commonly reported experiences among gifted individuals with CAPD. Environments that some people would consider enjoyable, such as assemblies, birthday parties, or family gatherings, can become exhausting or overwhelming. This sensitivity is often attributed to giftedness or overexcitability; however, CAPD may be a more accurate explanation. This distinction matters for accessing appropriate support.

Mishearing. Frequent mishearing can cause communication breakdowns, frustration, and an appearance of noncompliance or inattention. Frequent requests for repetition ("huh," "what"), "forgetting" or difficulty following auditory instructions, or insistence that "you

never said that" are classic behavioral presentations of mishearing auditory information. This symptom of CAPD is easy to overlook in gifted children who have strong vocabulary and reasoning skills.

Classroom or work performance doesn't match ability. A discrepancy between known intellectual capability and actual classroom performance, especially in lecture-style or verbally complex environments, may reflect an underlying auditory processing difficulty rather than a motivation or attention problem. When students misunderstand or miss part of the information in the classroom, it is more difficult to complete work. This pattern is especially easy to miss in gifted students, whose overall performance is classified as "fine" even though it may lie well below their real ability.

Social and emotional exhaustion. Group settings and busy listening environments can be more tiring for individuals with CAPD. When the auditory system becomes fatigued, an individual with CAPD may shut down, withdraw, or act out, not out of defiance but from genuine sensory overload. A preference for one-on-one interaction over group settings may be present and can be misinterpreted as a personality trait rather than CAPD.

Anxiety. Anxiety, meltdowns, and emotional outbursts frequently occur as a result of exhaustion and confusion from auditory overload. Repeated trips to the school nurse, avoidance of school or work events, and/or resistance to extracurricular or social activities are common strategies for escaping overwhelming auditory demands.

Behavioral concerns. Behavior is a form of communication. When an individual with CAPD appears noncompliant, it may be the result of an inefficient auditory system and not a lack of motivation or effort. The "Spoon Theory" helps convey why individuals with CAPD will tire more easily from listening and focusing, and can appear inattentive, noncompliant, overly emotional, distracted, and lazy. Even seemingly easy tasks such as a simple chore after school, a quick homework assignment, and going to the park, are no longer easy. CAPD can lead to exhausted, frustrated, overwhelmed, and overstimulated children. This is not laziness or lack of effort.

Difficulty with changes in routine. Disruptions to routine can be challenging to children with CAPD. Structure and predictability become a genuine source of relief rather than a preference.

Why Getting the Right Diagnosis Matters

An accurate diagnosis is crucial. Incorrect labels can prevent access to support, information, validation, and understanding. Individuals with CAPD who are not properly identified may

also face unfair, even unrealistic expectations. CAPD can impact all areas of one's life including academic and work performance, self-esteem, social relationships, and overall well-being. CAPD can also impact how one feels in noisy environments and their quality of life. A formal diagnosis helps demonstrate that an individual's struggles are due to an inefficient auditory system and not behavioral or intentional.

Audiologists often receive minimal training in CAPD during their formal education and do not test for CAPD during a traditional hearing test. It is important to seek out an audiologist that has received additional education and training in this specialty. The sensitivity and specificity of the test battery also matter. Assessments that are easy to pass result in false negatives. This causes children with CAPD to fall through the cracks and not receive proper understanding and support. There is also a false sense of security with screeners and they should be used with caution.

Children can be evaluated for CAPD as young as four years of age, provided they meet certain testing requirements. Some parents have been told their child needs to be 8 or 9 years old in order to have an evaluation. This is not true. Nonverbal individuals, as well as those with selective mutism, can be tested for CAPD.

What Treatment Looks Like

Appropriate identification and management of CAPD is crucial. There are five approaches to managing CAPD.

Compensatory strategies. These include, but are not limited to, preferential seating, quiet test environments, utilizing sound attenuating devices (i.e. headphones or earplugs) for concentration, and auditory breaks.

Auditory therapy. Therapies may take months or years to complete. There is a lack of evidence that these therapies improve the central auditory nervous system.

Low gain hearing aids. Hearing aids programmed with different noise algorithms are an option. However, some individuals with CAPD have reported that low-gain hearing aids increase their auditory overload.

FM systems. FM systems provide improved auditory input for one-on-one instruction and large lecture settings.

A passive ear filter. The passive filter is an evidence-based solution and improves speech discrimination by balancing timing asynchronies in the central auditory nervous system. The filter can be worn across environments, including one-on-one, group, and social settings.

A Note to Gifted Families and Professionals

CAPD is common within the gifted population and its symptom overlap with giftedness, overexcitabilities, and other commonly co-occurring diagnoses can pose a challenge to properly identifying this condition. Another challenge is the societal perception that gifted means easy and as a result many individuals with CAPD have been labeled inappropriately.

Characteristics such as sensitivity to sounds, distractibility, difficulty following verbal instructions, anxiety, and mishearing are often overlooked and advocating for a thorough CAPD assessment may be the next step. With accurate diagnosis and the right support, individuals with CAPD can be better supported and successful in their daily environments and experience more relief, confidence, and connection.

De Bonte, A., McCaffrey, C. A., Wisdom, H. K., Locke, M. E., Torgerson, N. G., & Lucero, T. (2024). Auditory Processing Disorders and Vision Processing Disorders in Twice-Exceptionality (2e): Are These Foundational Factors Being Overlooked? Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 47(1), 30-53.

Ronksley-Pavia, M. (2024). The Additional Burden of Auditory Processing Skill “Deficits” for a Young Person with Multiple Exceptionalities: A Case Study of a Twice-Exceptional Student. Roeper Review, 46(2), 140-159.



KNOWLEDGE GROWS THROUGH EXCHANGE

At Gifted Institute, we are both pleased and grateful for our extensive international network of researchers and professionals who share our curiosity about giftedness and the twice- and multi-exceptional profiles that require us to consider more than one explanation at a time.

Our collaboration with the Able Kids Foundation is one example. When distinct disciplines and bodies of experience meet across national borders, we gain opportunities to ask new questions, refine our understanding, and bring specialized knowledge closer to the children, adolescents, families, and professionals who may benefit from it.

We also wish to extend this openness to learning. Students are therefore welcome to apply for an internship at Gifted Institute.

INTERNSHIPS AT GIFTED INSTITUTE

An internship offers opportunities for in-depth academic study and close familiarity with the Institute's work with gifted, twice-exceptional, and multi-exceptional children, adolescents, and their families.

We offer both short-term career exploration placements for elementary and middle school students and longer internships undertaken as part of a higher education program. The content and scope of each placement are determined in relation to the student's educational background, interests, and the Institute's current opportunities.