

Processing Speed Difficulties in Children

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What are Processing Speed Difficulties?



Processing speed is how quickly we take in information, understand it, and respond.

Children with processing speed difficulties:

- Understand things, but need more time
- May seem slow to start or finish tasks
- Can feel overwhelmed when things move too quickly

This is not about intelligence. Many children with these difficulties are bright but need more time.



What might you notice?

A child may:

- Take longer to answer questions
- Struggle to keep up with instructions
- Need more time to finish work
- Lose track during multi-step tasks
- May seem distracted or 'not listening'
- Avoid tasks that feel rushed
- Get tired quickly when working



What does this look like day to day?



You say: "Put your coat on, get your bag, and go to the door."

The child:

- Only puts their coat on
- Misses the rest of the instructions
- Needs reminders or extra time



In class:

- Still working when others have finished
- Misses parts of lessons when pace is fast



At home:

- Takes a long time to get ready
- Struggles with routines unless supported

How can you help at home?

- Get their attention before speaking
- Keep instructions short and clear
- Break tasks into small steps
- Allow extra time - avoid rushing
- Use visual supports (lists, pictures)
- Repeat or rephrase calmly
- Use routines to reduce pressure
- Praise effort, not speed
- Give thinking time before expecting an answer



How can school help?

- Give extra time to complete work
- Break instructions into smaller steps
- Check understanding regularly
- Provide written and visual support
- Reduce time pressure where possible
- Allow processing time before expecting answers
- Seat near the teacher to reduce distractions



When to seek support?

Speak to a professional if:

- The child is finding it hard to keep up
- They become anxious or frustrated
- Difficulties affect learning or daily life

Support may come from school staff, educational psychologists, or other specialists.



Children with processing speed difficulties can do well.
They just need more time and the right support.

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