

Indigenous Students' School Behavior Problems and Conductive Hearing Loss

by Dr Damien Howard



Conductive Hearing Loss is a significant but unrecognized contributing factor to school behaviour problems of Indigenous students.

Children who live in crowded housing, and who experience poor nutrition and inadequate health care, are predisposed to repeated severe episodes of middle ear disease (otitis media) that results in Conductive Hearing Loss.

The issue is largely invisible, in part because schools tend to focus on cultural, personality, family or linguistic explanations of any behavioural or learning problems evident among minority students.

However, research has shown that it is Indigenous

students with Conductive Hearing Loss who are most disruptive in class (Howard, 2004).

Background noise can significantly increase the communication difficulties for children with hearing loss.

Although children with mild to moderate hearing loss may cope listening in a quiet environment, they experience more difficulties as the background noise level increases.






The school behavioral profile of Indigenous students with Conductive Hearing Loss in noisy school environment includes the following. They often:

- ⇒ have low self confidence and feel they are 'dumb';
- ⇒ are disruptive when unable

to cope with verbal communication;

- ⇒ can have volatile responses that are related to frustration or confusion, especially if experiencing listening overload or when dealing with unfamiliar situations or people;
- ⇒ may seek to dominate conversations, often 'call out' in class and 'tell on others';
- ⇒ may develop a 'teasing' social style that makes them unpopular with peers and;
- ⇒ are the Indigenous students most sensitive to anything that makes them feel shamed or socially excluded;
- ⇒ are often the students teachers find it most difficult to relate to.

Strategies to deal with behaviour problems related to Conductive Hearing Loss

-  Know who has a hearing loss in your class by using informal hearing tests such as Blind Man's Simon (www.eartroubles.com).
-  Use visually rich communication strategies and peer teaching in your classroom (see the ear troubles kit available at www.eartroubles.com).
-  Use sound field amplification and create the best acoustics possible in your classroom.
-  Create predictability in the classroom to help students know what to expect. Behaviour problems are often most evident when students face unfamiliar people and processes, especially when it's noisy.
-  Actively manage noise levels and listening demands in your classroom to minimize the anxiety and frustration experienced by students with Conductive Hearing Loss.

An online training program for teachers is available – *for information contact:*

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Further information is available at www.eartroubles.com; and from your Student Services or Support Teachers on hearing loss.