

A Day in the Life of a Child With Slow Processing Speed

Meet Sophia, a third grader with slow processing speed. She's a bright kid, but her brain needs a bit more time to take in and use information. Slow processing speed affects nearly every aspect of her day. To understand some of the surprising ways processing speed can affect kids, take a look at a typical day in Sophia's life.



7am

"Sophia, what do you want for breakfast?" Sophia is looking at Mom but doesn't answer. "Sophia, cereal or yogurt? Which one?" Feeling pressured, Sophia finally blurts out an answer: "Cereal." But it gets soggy before she realizes that she really wanted the yogurt. Now Mom is annoyed that Sophia might miss the bus.

Issues related to processing speed:
Making decisions

8:45am

Sophia is excited about her class job today: taking the attendance list to the office. But along the way, she forgets what she's doing or why. Unlike some kids with slow processing speed, Sophia doesn't have ADHD. But her brain processes information slowly, so there's less time to cram it into working memory before it gets lost.

Issues related to processing speed:
Using working memory



10am

Argh! Math sprints. The absolute worst. Sophia knows her multiplication facts, but she needs more time to think of the answers. She feels crummy when the teacher reminds the class that kids who finish early can read a book. Sophia probably won't even get through one column before time runs out.

Issues related to processing speed:
Building self-esteem, dealing with anxiety

12pm

Recess is only 20 minutes, and it takes Sophia a while to decide what she wants to do. She joins the kids trading Pokémon cards, which are banned at school. Sophia is slow to notice that the other kids are scrambling to hide their cards from the recess monitor. He sees Sophia with her cards, and she's the only one who gets in trouble.

Issues related to processing speed:

Making decisions, picking up on social cues



2:45pm

The end of the school day is so stressful. Sophia is always the last kid in her class to finish writing down the homework assignment that's on the board. No one can be dismissed until Sophia finishes. Writing is always hard for her, but it's even harder when her classmates keep saying "Hurry up!"

Issues related to processing speed:

Taking notes, dealing with anxiety

4:15pm

Sophia loves shooting hoops. She's particularly good at three-pointers. But the coach is a fast talker, and Sophia can't process what he's saying quickly enough. Her teammates are annoyed that she keeps forgetting the drills. And her long pauses make them feel awkward when they try to have a conversation with her.

Issues related to processing speed:

Following directions, having conversations



8:30pm

Sophia's homework is supposed to take half an hour. But she's been working on it for nearly two hours and it still isn't done. To get a good night's sleep, Sophia really needs to start her bedtime routine now. But Mom isn't sure what to do. *Should I help my child finish her homework or make sure she gets enough sleep?*

Issues related to processing speed:

Finishing homework, following routines

10pm

Brushing her teeth. Putting on pj's. Packing her backpack. Every step takes a long time. Bedtime is often an emotional time, too. Sophia tells Mom she isn't sure why she got in trouble at recess when the other kids didn't. As she's making connections and figuring out what happened, snuggling with Mom helps her feel a little better.

Issues related to processing speed:

Making connections, building self-esteem



About Slow Processing Speed



Having slow processing speed has nothing to do with how smart kids are. Their brains just take longer to take in information and respond to it. For example, some kids may know the right answer to a question—they just need more time to answer it.

When kids have slow processing speed, almost everything they do takes longer than it does for other kids. This includes doing homework, having a conversation and dealing with daily routines like deciding what to eat for breakfast.

Slow processing speed can co-occur with other learning and attention issues, like ADHD and dyslexia. Kids with slow processing speed are also at risk for anxiety and issues with self-esteem. But it's important to let them know there are strategies to help with any challenges they have.

Ways to Help

- Don't tell kids like Sophia to "hurry up." Pressuring kids with slow processing speed can make them take *longer* to complete a task.
- Use a timer. Knowing how long it takes to do tasks like brushing teeth can help kids build an awareness of time. It can also help families figure out what time to start daily routines like getting ready for school and getting ready for bed.
- Limit the amount of time spent each day on homework and let parents sign off on any unfinished assignments.
- Reduce distractions by using blank pieces of paper to cover all but one of the questions on a worksheet.
- Provide extended time for tests and other tasks.
- Talk to kids about slow processing speed. Give them time to ask questions. Make time for listening to their feelings and to their ideas about what might be helpful.

