

# How Fast is Smart?

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If you ask most children how they know who the smartest kids in class are, they will often respond that they are the ones who raise their hands the quickest and turn in their tests the fastest.

## **Assumption: Speed equals Intelligence.**

Before I address the implications of this assumption, let's look at one of the Executive Function skills known as Processing Speed. Processing Speed is how quickly one can carry out simple or automatic cognitive and motor tasks. We rely on our ability to process verbally, visually and physically in order to reason and perform tasks all day long. Our processing speed is affected by our knowledge base and experience. But it is also impacted by the amount of stress, pressure or anxiety we are experiencing in the moment. Lack of proper sleep and nutrition can also have a negative impact.



People who have ADHD often have a below normal Processing Speed when measured by the tests we generally rely upon. This can have a tremendous impact on learning and behaving. But more than that, it can have a tremendous impact on self-esteem. Children, and adults may feel less competent, self-conscious, and even helpless. They, and those around them, are often aware that they are not responding to the world as quickly as others, making them and others incorrectly assume that they are less intelligent and less capable.

## **Please – let's help kids break the association between Speed and Intelligence!**

The reality is that kids get messages from the world around them. It is up to us to help them balance those messages by what we do and say. Below are some suggestions for teachers and parents to help those who may take a little longer not feel “less than”.

- Don't assume that the child is being lazy or is unmotivated because they seem to take longer to get started or respond to what has been asked.
- Recognize that stress, pressure or anxiety can impact the speed that they process and respond, so help address those concerns.
- Accept that it may take longer for them to get ready, get organized, perform chores, or just respond to requests. Anticipate this and allow for the extra time they may need. Help them learn to become more accurate judges of how long they really need. (Using a Time Timer® can help them “see” the passage of time”)
- In class, when possible allow for “lag time”. For example, “In one minute I am going to ask who the first President was” and let them know that no one is to raise their hands until you say they can.
- Emphasize accuracy over speed and don't allow anyone to turn in papers until everyone will together.
- Provide visual support when possible so students can process at their own pace. Providing a set of class notes can allow a student focus on just listening.
- Encourage the use of assistive technology to ease the pressure to process (dictation, audio books where

spoken speed can be adjusted).

Help kids understand that having a slower processing speed is not always detrimental. After all, taking more time to truly consider information can help one to think more deeply and consider implications and options more thoroughly than one who quickly responds before careful thought. Tolerance, empathy, and support can go a long way in helping them feel valued, competent, and intelligent!