

Advice for children with noise sensitivities

Information for parents and carers

Listening to the world around us helps us make sense of where we are. Some children can be very sensitive to sound and can react badly to sudden loud noises. This is part of normal development and is common, however some children can remain sensitive to sound much longer than others.



Advice for noise sensitivities

The use of ear plugs, muffs or defenders should be **avoided** except in extreme situations. We do **not** recommend the use of ear plugs or ear defenders, even if your child finds a particular sound distressing. This is because it can make a child even more sensitive to louder sounds in the long term. You cannot achieve desensitisation with ear defenders in place, exposure to normal and tolerable sound is crucial if the ear and brain are to establish normal sensitivity. If ear defenders are in place, then please remove them gradually.

Please try the following strategies instead:

- Let your child take control of the activity so he/she learns that the noise can be started and stopped e.g. hand driers can be controlled by the child and the child can be asked to help with the school bell. Control is the key to gaining trust and desensitising.
- Provide lots of comfort and reassurance to your child when they exhibit distress to sounds.
- Explain the sound source to your child, making it clear why it makes its specific sound.
- Gently repeating your child's exposure to the noise may help them become more used to it and reduce anxiety. You could tape-record one or more of the problem sounds (e.g. laughter, clapping, thunder, school bell) and help him to switch the tape recorder to a very low volume. Gradually over a period of days or weeks the volume can be increased.
- If possible, involve your child in making the noise that distresses them but make it fun. Use the hairdryer to keep a balloon in the air, see who can do it for the longest. Tie dye a t-shirt, bag or pillowcase then use the washing machine to set the dye. Leave a paper trail to some treasure using torn up pieces of paper. Get your child to Hoover them up to follow the trail and find the treasure (a favourite toy, time to do something they love with you).
- A child's anxiety may increase if they are forced to remain in a situation that is causing the distress. It is important to allow them somewhere 'safe' to retreat to, should they require it.
- Your child may be reassured if they have permission to go to a 'quiet' area or even leave the classroom for a short while if they are distressed by a specific sound at school. This tends not to be an abused privilege.
- Where a location has become an area causing fear or distress (dinner hall, assembly hall) then allow the child to enter the area first and this will allow the noise to build around them.

Please visit the questionnaire below on Kids Scotland website for additional advice and strategies:

Sensory Questionnaire:

www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/263867/full-auditory-questionnaire-5-12-years_version-14.pdf



Kids Independently Developing Skills (KIDS) Website:

www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/



If the sound sensitivity issues are having an impact on day-to-day activities, despite using the strategies suggested above and on the KIDS website (or there are concerns regarding hearing), please discuss this with your GP or Paediatrician.

Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Service

