

Skills for Living

Helping your child with sensitivity to noise



What makes my child so sensitive to noise?

Many young children can find certain sounds uncomfortable. It is not unusual. They tend to be scared of loud, unexpected or irregular sounds such as fire alarms, vacuum cleaners, dogs barking, hand driers or even the flush of a toilet. Such noises can cause a child to become upset, cover their ears or even want to run away. Prolonged loud noises such as at a concert, firework display or even the volume of a film at the cinema may also be too much for a child to enjoy. Sensitivity tends to reduce as children get older.

- Noise sensitivity is a common occurrence among infants and toddlers. Loud and irregular noises are often the main issue.
- Toddlers and children hear the higher frequency sounds much more clearly than adults, as our hearing at higher frequencies reduces quickly with age.
- Children are also less used to sounds that adults have become accustomed to and tend not to notice any more. The loud high frequency sounds include many of the examples given above.
- Common signs of noise sensitivity include crying, clapping hands over the ears, fear of noise or noisy objects, and reluctance to participate in noisy or loud activities.
- If children cover their ears or cry when they hear sounds at normal volume, it is advisable to talk to your GP to find out if further checks are needed.
- As children grow and mature, so does their tolerance for loud noise. In the meantime, buying them inexpensive foam ear plugs can do wonders to make the child comfortable.

If your child is **easily overwhelmed** by noisy surroundings, you could try the following:

- Have a 'quiet space' where your child can go to calm down when they feel overwhelmed. Using cushions, blankets and other "comfy" items can help this.
- Give your child extra time to take in what you're saying. They may struggle to pick out your voice from a noisy background.
- Introduce your child to new places at quiet times first; gradually increasing the amount of time they spend there in further visits.
- Let your child try ear plugs, ear defenders or noise-cancelling headphones to help with sound sensitivities.
- Speak to people ahead of time about your child's needs if you're going somewhere – they might be able to adjust a few things to make it easier. For example, if you're making a playdate for your child, you could ask for it to be in a place that's familiar to your child.
- Prepare your child for unexpected noises in their surroundings. Talk about fire engines, police cars and ambulances and the important work they do. Talk about dogs barking and try to reduce fear. Prepare your child to think about what to do when they hear an uncomfortable noise.
- Many cinemas that have adapted movie screenings when the volume is lower and it is not so dark. There are often no additional adverts or trailers. Children are also allowed to move around the room.

What Can We Do To Help?

Ideas to help at home and at school:	
<p>Try to warn and prepare the child in advance and create a plan to cope with those <i>regular predictable</i> loud noises.</p> <p>E.g. Using the Hoover, the sound of the school bell ringing</p>	<p>Try a gradual control approach e.g. the child might watch the Hoover come out and get plugged in then has chance to move to a comfortable distance, cover their ears, and give a thumbs up. When the child is ready, turn on the Hoover. Do it in short bursts if it helps them better tolerate the noise. Maybe for the count of 10. Each time repeat the thumbs up action to make sure the child is ready. This quick solution can make a HUGE difference in how the day goes.</p> <p>Remind the child when the school bell is due to sound. If possible use a reminder such as a watch alarm or music clip. Allow the child to move to a “comfortable place” or to cover their ears with hands if needed. It is often helpful to have a visual timer to indicate how long the sound will last and when it will finish.</p> <p>Make arrangements for the child to be bell monitor – so they control when the bell sounds.</p>
<p>Create a space and time for quiet, for loud noise, or both</p>	<p>If the child wants to make noise, make time to do so. Turn on music and get out some instruments. Give them the freedom to be as loud as they want without being quietened. Giving this space to make noise helps them to be more in control the rest of the time.</p> <p>Also set aside quiet time for a break from sound with books and quiet activities. Head phones, ear plugs, soothing music, and noise machines can also be very helpful for many children.</p> <p>Create a playlist of soothing music – it can often change the mood for the whole house.</p>
<p>Provide relief when needed</p>	<p>Headphones and earplugs offer instant comfort and relief. Noise-cancelling headphones are the most effective, because they replace irritating environmental noise by producing calming white noise. Earplugs are usually made of either foam or wax, and it is worth trying both types to determine which is more comfortable.</p> <p>Ear defenders can help greatly for children to use the public bathrooms, or go to a friend’s party or firework display. They should not be used too often. In the long run, blocking out noise can reduce coping skills and increase social withdrawal.</p>
<p>Allow distractions</p>	<p>Allowing a child to use a calming toy or activity to focus on can help to direct attention away from the upsetting noises.</p> <p>Toys to squeeze, push, pull – heavy work Something to chew on can be calming Calming / relaxing music on headphones</p>

Gradually increase the child's tolerance of unexpected noises	<p>For example –the sound of Fire Engines etc. Start with pictures of fire engines and emergency vehicles in a book. Imitate the sound of a siren. Read books about firefighters and police officers. Watch YouTube videos of fire engines in action. Go for a tour of the local fire station, Play games to point out fire engines and ambulances when out driving. Have a plan to cover ears and count to 10 when a loud siren passes by. Gradually reduce this over time.</p>
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Websites and online links for more information	
Pinterest - An online notice board of information	www.pinterest.com Type search words e.g. “activities to help when sensitive to noise” etc.
For further information: Useful ideas to help in the classroom http://sensory-processing.middletonautism.com/sensory-strategies/strategies-according-to-sense/auditory/over-responsive/ 7 ways to help your child cope with noise sensitivity https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/sensory-processing-issues/7-ways-to-help-your-child-cope-with-noise-sensitivity	