

Sound sensitivity

This leaflet explains more about sound sensitivity and what you can do to help your child. If you require further information, please do not hesitate to ask the member of staff looking after your child.

What is it?

Some children experience sensitivity to certain sounds, where they appear to find some sounds uncomfortable or upsetting. This is sometimes called hyperacusis. A more extreme fear of certain sounds is known as phonophobia. It can vary from child to child. Frequently the sensitivity appears to sudden, loud sounds such as sirens, vacuum cleaners, motorbikes, fireworks, balloons popping, hair dryers and hand dryers. For some children specific types of sounds (which may not seem that loud to other people) can be problematic.

What causes it?

Sound sensitivity can be a normal phase that children go through. A lot of young children find loud, sudden sounds scary, particularly if they don't fully understand why the sound has appeared. Most children will adapt as they learn to understand what the noise is, where it comes from and that it isn't anything dangerous.

It is not uncommon for a child with additional sensory issues or complex needs to experience sound sensitivity. Occupational Therapy, your paediatrician or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) may be able to provide more specific support.

What can I do to help?

Reassurance

Reassure your child when they come across a sound that they find upsetting. Explaining to them what the sound is, where it comes from and why it is loud can help them to understand. If you know the sound is coming, prepare your child by telling them about it in advance.

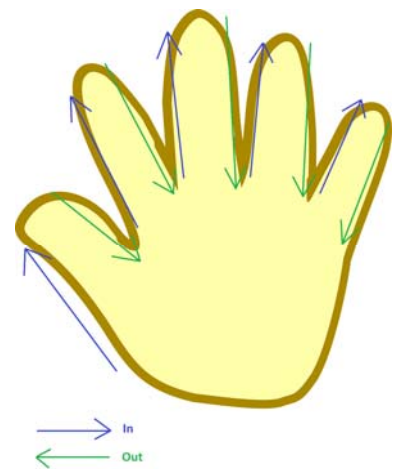
Remove the fear factor

Humour is a great way of removing the fear from an object. If your child is scared of the hairdryer or the washing machine, you could dress it up with big glasses and stick some funny ears on it and give it a silly voice, for instance. It's very hard to be scared of something that you are giggling at!

Relaxation and breathing

Breathing techniques can help to relieve anxiety and give your child something else to focus on rather than the sound that is upsetting. There are many apps you can download to your smartphone or tablet. One very easy way is to use your child's hand and encourage them to breathe in and out as they trace their way up and down their finger-tips.

There are lots of suggestions for relaxation techniques for children available online.



Desensitisation

It can be tempting to remove your child from a distressing situation or to use ear defenders to help them. Unfortunately, this is likely to make them more sensitive to the particular sound they are avoiding as, when they do come across it, they will find it all the more distressing for not having had a chance to get used to it.

Allowing your child the opportunity to get used to the sound they dislike in a safe, controlled way, can help them to become less sensitive to it. You can use videos on the internet to show your child a video clip of the sound they find upsetting, with the volume turned down, or even off completely.

Prepare the child for the start of the clip, get them to press the “play” button, and allow them to alter the volume - this can give them a sense of control. Then gradually increase the volume as they become less sensitive to it. This can take time, for instance try five minutes one week at a certain level then again a few days later at a louder level.

Traffic Light System

For older children, it can help to explain to your child that the reason they find some sounds upsetting is that their brain is being too clever! You can use a traffic light system to show that their brain has switched on to high alert “red” and is flagging up too many sounds as scary.

By flagging up so many sounds as scary, their brain is getting ready to deal with what it thinks is something to be worried about. We want their brain to go back to low alert “green” and let more sounds through as not scary. Encouraging your child to remember this each time they encounter an upsetting sound can help get their brain back to “green”.

Contact us

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Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

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t: 111

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t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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