

Sound sensitivity

This leaflet explains more about sound sensitivity and what you can do to help your child. If you need more information, please speak to the member of staff looking after your child.

Sound sensitivity

Some children are sensitive to certain sounds, and they seem to find some sounds uncomfortable or upsetting. This is sometimes called hyperacusis. A more extreme fear of certain sounds is known as phonophobia. It is different for each child. The sensitivity is often to sudden, loud sounds, such as sirens, vacuum cleaners, motorbikes, fireworks, balloons popping, hair dryers and hand dryers. For some children it is the type of sounds (which might not seem that loud to other people) can be problematic, and not how loud it is.

What causes sound sensitivity?

It 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 happened. Most children change as they learn to understand what the noise is, where it comes from and that it is not anything dangerous.

It is common for a child with additional sensory issues or complex needs to experience sound sensitivity. The occupational therapy team, your paediatrician or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) might be able to give more specific support.

What you can do to help

Reassurance

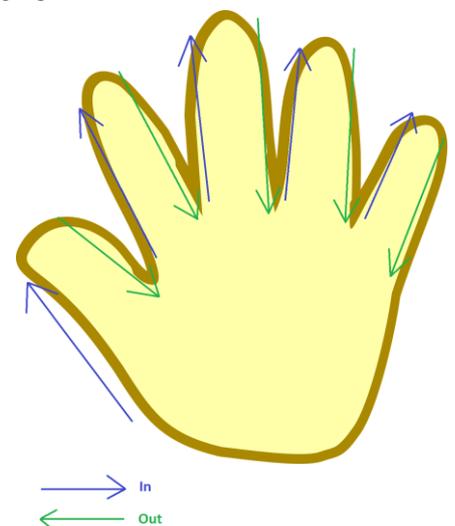
Reassure your child when they hear a sound that they find upsetting. Explain what the sound is, where it comes from, and why it is loud, to help them understand. If you know the sound is coming, prepare your child by telling them about it before it happens.

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 is 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 lots of free apps. A 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. Unfortunately, this is likely to make them more sensitive to the particular sound they are avoiding. When they do hear it, they will find it more distressing because they have not had the chance to get used to it.

Giving 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 change 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, so try 5 minutes at a certain level, then in a few days later at a louder level.

Traffic light system

For older children, it can help to explain to them 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 hear an upsetting sound can help get their brain back to 'green'.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about sound sensitivity, please contact the Children and Young People's Audiology Team, **tel:** 020 3049 8560, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5.30pm, **email:** gst-tr.cypacquiries@nhs.net.

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web:** www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **tel:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk. To make a complaint, contact the complaints department, **tel:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** 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, **tel:** 020 7188 8815, **email:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **tel** 111, **web:** 111.nhs.uk



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