

Helping with Noise Sensitivity

Helpful Tips

1. When the child becomes distressed by exposure to sound, move the child away from the sound source if possible and then comfort and reassure him/her.
2. Try to explain the source of the sound to the child.
3. The child's fear/reaction will often diminish if s/he can exercise some control over the sounds.
4. Repeated gentle exposure to the noise may help the child to reduce anxiety and desensitise the auditory aspect of the sensitivity. You could tape-record one or more of the problem sounds (e.g. laughter, clapping, thunder, sirens, 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.
5. Practice with the sounds under play conditions that the child can control, to help break the association of that sound with fear. This is not the same as unexpected exposure to the same sound, as people with hyperacusis do say that they can often cope better if they are warned that a sound is about occur, but it is helpful.
6. Play some activities that allow the child to become familiar with sounds. So encourage the child to clap his/her own hands, tapping a table top in a certain rhythm or shaking rattles but the child is always in control of the sounds. Encourage the home to continue this work e.g. to start and stop the vacuum cleaner.
7. You can help your child to become desensitised to noise by producing a range of different sounds in a play situation.
8. Children should not be forced to stay in a situation that is causing them obvious distress (for example during singing in assembly). This may compound their apprehension and make them associate that situation (e.g. the assembly hall) with pain. If fear of a specific situation has become established, it is important to gradually desensitise the child, with time and care.

9. 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.

10. Older children may be reassured if they are told they have the teacher's permission to leave the classroom for a few minutes at any point if they are exposed to an aversive noise. In our experience children do not abuse such an arrangement but are greatly reassured to know that they can leave a room, for a short time, if noise becomes distressing to them.

11. The use of ear plugs, muffs or defenders should be avoided except in extreme situations. 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 remove them gradually.