

# Sound Sensitivity in Children

## Audiology Department

### Patient Information Leaflet

This leaflet explains a little about sound sensitivity and what you can do to help your child.

#### **What is sensitivity to sound?**

The world is a loud place for little ears, and it is not unusual for children to be sensitive to sounds. It can affect people of all ages, including adults, but is most common in young children under the age of six.

While it is true that noise sensitivity is common in children with certain medical conditions, the average child may also shy away from or become uncomfortable when confronted with loud noises.

Babies may cry or fuss and toddlers may cover their ears with their hands to avoid the sound.

Interestingly, children with sound sensitivity have normal and not super-normal hearing.

Typically, as children grow and mature, so does their tolerance for sound.

#### **What causes sound sensitivity in children?**

A lot of young children go through a phase where they find loud, sudden sounds scary, particularly if they don't fully understand why the sound has happened. Sound sensitivity in children usually improves as the

child learns to understand what the noise is, where it comes from and that it is not anything dangerous.

## Types of common sounds children find distressing and loudness level:

Sound	Typical level
Vacuum cleaner	60-85dB
Hand dryer	70-85dB
Emergency vehicle siren	120dB
Children shouting	70-90dB
Baby crying	Up to 130dB
Fireworks	140dB

## Glue ear and sound sensitivity

Children who have had glue ear are often sensitive to sound once glue ear has cleared. Glue ear may cause hearing to be reduced for prolonged periods of time. When it clears spontaneously, the world seems a louder place. It takes time to get used to the loudness of everyday noises again.

More information on glue ear can be found by visiting [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

## What can you do to help?

Most children find their sensitivity to sound gets better over time. To help with this it is important that parents, carers, and teachers are consistent in the way that they respond to the child's sound sensitivity. Parents are urged to keep track of any specific sounds their child is sensitive to and share with all caregivers.

## 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. If you know the sound is coming, prepare your child by telling them before it happens. Their reaction to a sound may be reduced if they have some control, for example if your child is upset by the vacuum cleaner, encourage them to turn it on and off. Although it is important to recognise that your child finds some sounds uncomfortable, it may not be helpful to focus on it.

It can be tempting to remove your child from the distressing situation or to use ear defenders. We do not recommend the use of ear defenders or

ear plugs; this can cause a child to become even more sensitive to sounds in the long term. Avoid silence.

### **Relaxation and breathing**

Breathing techniques can help to relieve anxiety and give your child something else to focus on other than the sound. There are lots of free apps and suggestions for relaxation techniques for children online.

### **Behavioural desensitisation**

This method can be used when your child's response to distressing sounds is causing them to avoid important occasions. Behavioural desensitisation can help break down the association between the noise and the fear. It can be done by the family, without the need for professional support. It involves your child repeatedly listening to the distressing sound under controlled conditions, i.e., you could record the sound onto your mobile phone or computer and then play the sound at a low volume. Over the next few days or weeks, gradually increase the volume until you are playing the sound at a level that usually causes distress. By that time, your child should be used to the sound and not get upset by it.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Audiology Department, Brierley Hill Health & Social Care Centre:  
01384 32266 [audiology.referrals@nhs.net](mailto:audiology.referrals@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

یہ کتابچہ آپ کو بڑے حروف کی لکھائی، سمعی صورت اور دیگر زبانوں میں مہیا کیا جا سکتا ہے۔ برائے مہربانی فون نمبر 08000730510 پر رابطہ کریں۔