

Children's Early Years Occupational Therapy Service



Helping our Tots to cope with Noise

Advice and strategies for Parents/Guardians

Auditory sensitivity for children with sensory needs

Children with auditory sensitivity are often happy making lots of their own noise, or listening to music loudly, this is because they are in control of creating the noise, which makes it very predictable and reassuring for them. The way we perceive sounds changes when we are over-alert, or feeling stressed or anxious, and certain pitches of noise can be very alarming. We may also lose the ability to listen attentively to other people and what they are saying, this is because our bodies are in “survival mode”. When children are over-alert they can often display stress-response behaviours (e.g. hitting out). It is important to talk about these stress responses when children are back in a calm-alert state, when they are more able to listen.

Ideas for home/when out and about

- Consider ear defenders; customise them before use with stickers, and trial on a teddy before wearing to make your child feel comfortable using them.
- Inner ear defenders may be a more discreet way to block out noise.
- Trial listening to music your child enjoys, or white noise at a low level when in challenging/loud environments.
- Ear buds or blue tooth earphones can be a more discreet way to listen music at a low level.
- Bone conducting ear phones can be a good way to listen to music, without entirely blocking out other sounds.
- Headband earphones may be a more comfortable alternative.
- Trial using noise cancelling headphones.

Please be aware that any music/white noise/noise cancelling earphones should not be used constantly. If they are used constantly they may increase auditory sensitivities. They should be used as a strategy only in challenging environments.

- Engaging your child in proprioceptive activities can help to calm their other senses, including their auditory sense.
- Offer your child a safe place to retreat to if they find noisy environments overwhelming. For example fitting a large cover over a buggy.

Ideas for Nursery/School

- In a classroom setting, allow children with auditory sensitivities to sit away from noise distractions, such as the teacher typing on a computer, or under strip lighting.
- Children with auditory sensitivities may be overwhelmed by the school dining room, which may impact on them eating at school. Try and provide a quiet area or classroom for children to eat in.
- Where possible, create a quiet space for children to access when they are overwhelmed, e.g. the school library or quiet corner of the classroom.
- The bathrooms at school can be very noisy, due to flushing toilets and hand dryers. Allow children to use the bathroom at times which are likely to be less busy. Make sure paper towels are provided as an alternative to a hand dryer.
- Break times may be an especially noisy time at school and having a quiet place to access may be beneficial.
- Ensure your child's teacher is aware of their auditory sensitivities so that they can identify when they need to use strategies to support their needs.