

PATIENT INFORMATION

Sound Sensitivity

Practical Ways to Help your Child



What is sound sensitivity?

Just like adults, some children can find certain sounds uncomfortable e.g. hand dryers, fire alarms, fireworks, vacuum cleaners. Especially if the sound is sudden in nature and the child does not know the cause of the sound. Often this is a normal phase and will improve through the understanding of what the sounds are, and that they are not dangerous.

Some children experience sensitivity to certain sounds and will find these uncomfortable and upsetting. Some children will develop a negative reaction to these sounds such as fear or anxiety, which in turn heightens their reaction the next time they hear it.

Rarely, a child may be diagnosed with an extreme hypersensitivity to sound. This condition is referred to as hyperacusis. This is when common sounds can seem unusually loud, intrusive and sometimes painful.

What causes it?

Sound sensitivity can be more common with certain syndromes or conditions, and children with sensory issues, or complex needs may experience sound sensitivity. Sometimes it can be in response to exposure to loud noise but often there is no obvious reason for why a child may become distressed in response to a particular sound or sounds.

Children with glue ear may be more susceptible to sensitivity to sound. Often, they will have periods of reduced hearing due to the build up of fluid in the middle ear. Once clear, the world can appear a noisy place and it can take some time to get used to loud noises again.

What signs should I look out for?

When confronted with loud noises, children with sound sensitivity may:

- Cry
- Cover their ears with their hands
- Avoid sounds by leaving the room or turning off the television
- Show signs of anger, distress or panic
- Show nervousness in particular environments

What you can do to help

Reassurance

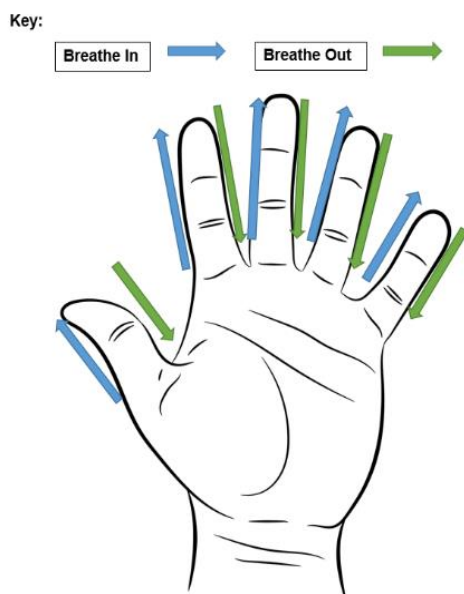
Acknowledge when your child finds a sound upsetting, comfort and reassure them. It may be helpful to explain what the sound is, why it is loud, and where it is coming from, pre-warning where possible. Be careful not to overact, focus on it, or promote avoidance behaviours, this can lead to a greater reaction next time. Children should not be forced to stay in a situation that they find distressing. For older children, it may be helpful to explain that the brain has become on high alert, thinking that it is being helpful by flagging up these 'scary' sounds to them. Over time we want to teach the brain that these sounds are no longer scary.

Remove the fear factor

The fear reaction will often diminish if your child can have some control over the situation e.g. turning the vacuum cleaner on and off. Some sounds can be made into a game e.g. clapping hands as part of a song/game or making a pots and pans drum kit. Humour is also a great way of removing fear from an object e.g. an object could be given funny ears or a silly voice. It's hard to fear an object when you are laughing.

Relaxation and breathing

Breathing techniques can give your child another focus away from the upsetting sound and can help calm their anxiety. There are many breathing techniques and apps available online. One technique uses their own hand as a guide. Encourage your child to breathe in and out as they trace their way up and down their fingertips. See diagram.



Encourage your child to relax their muscles by stretching their arms above their head to make themselves as tall as possible and then let them flop down folding their body forwards. Get them to repeat this several times.

Being physically active every day and sleeping well can also reduce anxiety.

Desensitisation

Although children should not be forced to stay in a situation that they find distressing, automatically removing them, or using ear defenders can add more sensitivity and distress to that sound. Repeated and gentle exposure in a safe and controlled way can help reduce this. Introduce sounds gradually, this can be a recording of the sound at a low level or having the sound in a different room. This could be presented whilst the child is playing. Your child may find it useful to watch a video online of the sound. They can be in control of the play, mute or volume button. Gradually increase the volume until it is at the same level as when your child found it distressing, this may take hours, days or weeks until they no longer associate the sound with fear. This can take time and patience, and it is important that everyone, including your child's nursery/ school have a consistent approach. Older children may feel reassured that the teachers understand if they need to step away from a distressing situation. Try to avoid long periods of silence by playing music, white noise, or other pleasant nature sounds can help.

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

If you feel that your child has a hearing loss, please contact the Audiology Department using the details below:

Email: wah-tr.AudiologyHearingServices@nhs.net

Text Only:

Worcester 0778 633 4306

Redditch 0743 603 5394

Kidderminster 0780 802 4894

Telephone:

Worcester 01905 760 171

Evesham 01386 502 578

Redditch 01527 505 741

Kidderminster 01562 826 324/ 01562 826 323

If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.