



Sensitivity to Noise & Ear Defender Use Guidance **CYP Occupational Therapy Services**



Sensitivity to sound can pose challenges for some children and young people on a day-to-day basis. If recognised or observed in a child or young person, it would be helpful to explore and use the following advice and strategies;

1. When the child becomes distressed by exposure to a specific sound or sounds, 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 may diminish if s/he can exercise some control over the sounds, for example distress caused by a Hoover or hair dryer – ask the child/ young person to try turning this on and off, leaving it on for longer each time as tolerated.
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, 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.

If the strategies are unsuccessful after a sustained period of trial, and noise continues to prove distressing or upsetting for a child/ young person – it may be worth considering the use of ear defenders or ear plugs, or for older children headphones/ air pods.

Ear defenders etc should be used cautiously – but with an awareness that they are extremely helpful for some. It may be worth seeking support from the occupational therapy service around appropriate use.

With thanks to colleagues in Fife Health & Social Care Partnership