

Auditory Sensory Strategies

What is it?



What we hear, this is known as our **auditory sense**. Auditory defensiveness is considered extreme sensitivity to sound. This includes sounds which are not particularly disturbing or distressing to most people. These may be specifically high frequency sounds, low frequency sounds, or both high and low frequency sounds. When children are oversensitive to sound, it results in fear, anxiety, and at times avoidance of the activities that most other children enjoy participating in. A child who has auditory defensiveness, when faced with the sound, might typically cover their ears and show signs of distress - or might begin to cry. Typically

distressing sounds include the noise made by power tools, hair or hand dryers, vacuum cleaners, lawn mowers, thunder and fireworks. Whilst some individuals are sensitive only to loud sudden noises, such as fire drills, others can be sensitive to noises that others easily screen out, such as the background noises of machines (e.g. fans, fluorescent lights, computers, ticking clocks, etc.) or certain pitch or volume of voices.

How you can help:

- Prepare child for any loud noises which can be predicted. Whenever possible, give the child a verbal or visual warning before loud sounds occur (such as lawn mower, fire alarm drill)
- Adapt the environment or situation if possible.
- Reassure the child that the noise isn't going to hurt them. Explain and discuss the source of the noise to increase the child's understanding.
- Use head-phones, ear-muffs or ear-plugs to decrease level of sound.
- Some younger children might be fine just holding their hands over their ears, if they are motivated enough to stay for a "noisy" event. Encourage physical activities such as pulling, pushing against a resistance throughout the day. Hugs from others and self. Firm pressure down through the shoulders can also be calming. Trial these techniques before and after a noisy event as this is calming and organizing.
- You might need to remove the child from the area until the sound goes away or find a quieter corner that is away from the noise. For instance, in a noisy restaurant try and find a quiet corner away from the kitchen. In a noisy classroom you might suggest having a very quiet corner for the child to retreat to when noise becomes overwhelming.
- Adults to communicate in soft tone, slow speech.
- Wear snug/tight clothing which can have a calming effect
- Listening to music (e.g. classical music) through headphones to help drown out environmental noise may help your child to stay better focused on an activity. When possible allow child control of the equipment/ volume.
- Chew gum, suck on sports water-bottle or sour candy, eat chewy or crunchy foods to help increase concentration in noisy environment.
- Share awareness about your child's sensitivity with teachers, family members, neighbours, etc. When a child knows that adults around him/her understand their "hidden" needs, the child feels safer and is likely to feel less anxious.
- Use rugs and/or curtains in a room to improve the acoustics of a room and decrease the echo, loudness of and extraneous noise.

Additional Strategies for school / classroom.

- Preferential seating at front of classroom.
- Children with auditory defensiveness benefit from one-to-one teaching.
- Working in small groups, sectioning off areas of the room.
- Fidget toys, stress balls and squeezable objects/ toys can compete with external stimuli.
- Be aware of low level background noises eg. Ticking clocks. Adapt or remove where possible.
- Allow child to have access to ear defenders to be used when they feel needed eg. Assemblies. Having them available provides the child with security and reassurance. Should not be used all the time.
- Have a quiet space that the child can go to if they feel the need to remove themselves from the situation.