





Children and Young People's
Occupational Therapy Service.

Sense-Able Ideas: Auditory processing differences

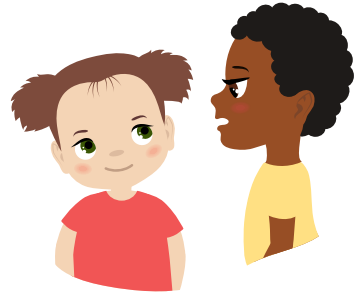
Practical strategies and
activities for parents or
carers to use at home
and in the community



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Auditory sensory system



Able to sense and understand sound



Determine the direction where sounds came



Gauge the importance of the sounds

All references to child/children means either a child or young person.

What is auditory processing?

Auditory processing refers to how the brain recognises and makes sense of sounds. Sounds consist of loudness, pitch, how long it lasts for and where it is coming from. We automatically put all this information together and respond to it. We can usually cut out unwanted noise so we can concentrate on the task we need, or want, to do.

What happens when a child experiences this differently?

There are potentially two types of auditory processing. The first is an over-responsiveness to sounds and the second is an under-responsiveness to sounds.

If a child is over-responsive to sounds the noise can be painful. If a child is under-responsive they do not register the noise.

If difficulties exist with over-responsiveness you may see the following behaviours:

- Runs from household noise
- Covers ears at loud noises and becomes very distressed
- May hum to block out external noise
- Easily distracted by background noise
- Hears things that most people do not

If difficulties exist with under-responsiveness you may see the following behaviours:

- Turns up the volume of the television or music*
- Does not appear to hear when called
- Likes repetitive sounds*
- Hums in noisy environments*
- Not alarmed by sudden noises

*Please note that these behaviours may also be seen in children who are over sensitive to sounds. They may be struggling to screen out surplus noise to listen to your voice or they may hum to block out other unexpected noise.

This booklet lists some of the most common concerns raised by parents or carers and provides strategies or activities to help support your child.

LISTENING



Ways to help auditory processing differences

Difference identified	Suggested strategy or activity
<p>Runs away from household noises, for example, hairdryer, washing machine, Hoover</p>	<p>Showing your child the sound source can often ease the anxiety and, where possible, asking them to touch it or turn it on.</p> <p>Encourage your child to stay at a distance but in the same room. You could perhaps use a pop-up tent as a hide out so they can still see but feel protected at the same time.</p>
<p>Covers ears when in the hairdressers</p>	<p>Allow your child to wear headphones in the hairdressers with a familiar piece of music to help drown out the sound of the clippers or hairdryers.</p> <p>Inform the hairdresser that using scissors may be more helpful to your child.</p>
<p>Covers ears at unexpected times</p>	<p>Try to limit the amount of spoken re-assurance. Your child may be trying to block out too many sounds coming in at one time and have difficulty processing them all.</p> <p>Instead reassure them by holding their hand firmly or placing firm hands on their shoulders.</p>

<p>Hums and covers ears</p>	<p>Consider the environment and the noise levels. Try moving to a quieter area or reduce noise levels within the room. Your child may be trying to process too many sounds and thoughts at too fast a speed.</p>
<p>Holds toys to ear and has volume on high</p>	<p>Ask for your child to be assessed by an audiologist (person who checks your hearing) to rule out a hearing issue.</p> <p>Encourage your child to hold the toy at a safe distance not to damage the ear.</p>
<p>Does not appear to hear you when spoken to</p>	<p>Ask for your child to be assessed by an audiologist to rule out a hearing issue.</p> <p>Ensure that play activity is in a distraction free area for short periods until your child engages with you.</p> <p>Does your child recognise when they are being spoken to? Do they know what their name is? Basic work to help them know who they are such as using photographs and labelling their chair, picture book, coat peg, bedroom may help with this.</p> <p>Approach your child from the front and if they are not touch sensitive, a gentle touch to their arm. Doing this before speaking may help your child to focus their attention on you rather than the distraction, for example, cars going past in the street.</p>

<p>Easily distracted by a distant sound, for example, fire engine, ambulance</p>	<p>When you also hear the noise, telling your child what they can hear, can help to reassure them.</p> <p>If in walking distance, walk towards the sound so that your child can see where the noise is coming from can also be helpful.</p>
<p>Easily startled by less common sounds, for example, mobile telephone ring tones, hand-driers</p>	<p>Find out where the noise is coming from, and reassure your child that the noise will stop. This helps them to understand that there is an end to the noise.</p> <p>Playing simple role play games with telephones and allowing your child to choose different ring tones can also help reduce the fear.</p> <p>Turning the ring tone down or moving landline telephones to another room for a short time. Then over a period of weeks slowly bring the telephone back into the room in which your child plays. This can help make your child less sensitive to uncommon sounds.</p>
<p>Gets “high” from repetitive sounds</p>	<p>Use an egg timer to show your child that an activity is soon going to stop. This can encourage your child to stop pressing sound toys over and over again. Limiting the sound before your child become over excited.</p>

<p>Gets frustrated by busy or noisy environments</p>	<p>Gently introduce your child to busy environments where there is an end goal for them, for example, visit the supermarket to buy them a magazine.</p> <p>Use of earphones, hood or hat so that your child feels their ears are protected when they have to be exposed to longer periods of noisy activity.</p> <p>Allow your child to walk on the inside of the pavement when out in busy streets rather than near the roadside close to fast, noisy vehicles.</p>
<p>Places hands over people's mouths when they sing or talk</p>	<p>Too many people singing or talking at once can cause confusion. If your child covers your mouth, stop talking and look around to see if someone else is also talking or joining in. Remember to have one adult talking at one time.</p> <p>Prepare your child if two people are going to sing at one time, for example, Mummy and Anne are singing today.</p>
<p>Never alarmed by sudden noises</p>	<p>Ask for your child to be assessed by an audiologist to rule out a hearing issue.</p> <p>Often children who are not alarmed are tuning into something they find far more interesting. Try using exaggerated expressions and higher tone to draw your child's attention to sudden sound.</p>

Becomes anxious by loud, sudden noises, for example, balloon popping, hand drier in public toilets

Showing or telling your child what the loud noise is can help reassure them, for example, “wow it’s the balloon, look!” or “look it’s the hand drier”.

Encourage your child to play with the object that makes the noise or watch you play with it, for example:

- create fun games like blowing up the balloon and letting it go,
- releasing a small squeaky bit of air out, or
- allowing your child to be in control by stamping or using a cocktail stick to pop balloons.

Do not avoid public toilets. Slowly introduce your child to hand driers and reassure them. For example, stand outside the toilet area and tell them when you hear the hand drier go off “Listen, it’s the hand drier”. Slowly build this up, for example, encourage your child to watch you or someone else dry their hands from a distance to help reduce your their fears.

Contact information

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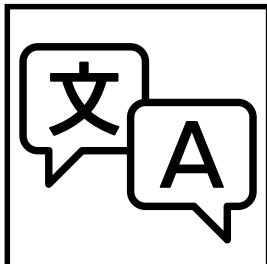
Email: aa-uhb.clinical-rainbowhouse@nhs.net

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aa-uhb.clinical-rainbowhouse@aapct.scot.nhs.uk

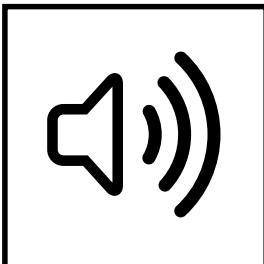
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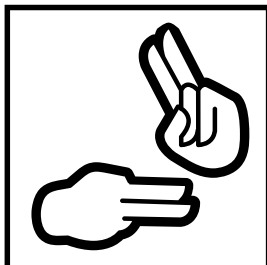
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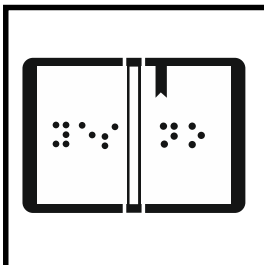
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