

Sound sensitivity in young people

Information for young people

What is sound sensitivity?

Definitions and terms:

It can be normal to dislike some sounds, however, when you are always distressed and always have discomfort when you hear a sound, you have a sound sensitivity. Sound sensitivities can cause different levels of distress and discomfort.

Common sounds people react towards include: vacuum cleaners, hair dryers, hand dryers, the school bell. Some people have very few sounds that they find distressing and others may have a long list of sounds. This is because everyone is different.

You may find that you place your hands over or your fingers in your ears. You may also try to avoid the sound or become very anxious even before the sound is heard. Sometimes this can be seen in your behaviour, for example, maybe you don't want to go to a particular place because of the sounds.

Interestingly, the sounds you react to may be everyday noises that other people find surprising, as it doesn't appear to be a problem for others. Also it is not unusual to enjoy some loud sounds, yet have real difficulty with other sounds. Sound sensitivity is **not** an overall sensitivity of every sound, but more a reaction towards certain sounds

Do I have sound sensitivity?

If you recognise the following behaviours, you may well have sound sensitivity:

- Becoming upset in response to a particular sound (crying, trembling, startles)
- Protecting your ears in response to a particular sound
- Becoming anxious either before or during exposure to a particular sound
- Avoiding the sound source if possible.

How can I help myself?

The very good news is that when given appropriate help, we would expect your sound sensitivity to get better. Sound sensitivity does not need to be a problem forever.

The two ways to help are **Behavioural Management** and **Recalibration**. Both of these are quite easy to use in everyday life. We advise that you use both Behavioural Management and Recalibration to give yourself the very best chances to improve.

It might be useful for you to note down the sounds that you know you are sensitive towards; we have provided space below for you to do this. (You can re-visit this list at the end of the program. This is a great way to judge how well you have done after six months of following the program).

Sounds I am sensitive towards:

Example: hand-dryer, vacuum cleaner...

Behavioural Management is a way that you can help with the distress, anxiety and avoidance you have towards sounds. We suggest using the following steps. These can be changed to suit your particular needs.

5 step Behavioural Management structure:

1. Be reassured that the sounds you are reacting towards will not harm you.
2. Once your brain understands that a sound is not threatening, your reaction towards it will become less. Over time this will help your body to not react towards it.
3. Find ways to have some control over the sounds to gently build up tolerance towards them.
4. Gently repeating your exposure to the sound may help you become more used to it. We would never advise totally avoiding a sound, because this would not allow you the chance to have normal sensitivity of sound. It is important to let you know that **ear defenders, plugs or muffs should not be used except in extreme or short-term situations that can't be avoided (such as a loud concert)**. Hearing normal sounds is really important if you are to have normal reactions towards sounds.
5. If you are **forced** to stay where you are upset you probably will become more upset. It is important to make sure you can leave and go somewhere safe. A good way to do this is by working with some adults in your life (teachers in school, parents/carers at home) to make sure you have somewhere safe to go to, such as a quiet area in school or another room at home.

Recalibration

- Recalibration means using pleasant sounds to change the way you hear sounds that are causing upset. Over time, recalibration turns down the volume control in your head towards those particular sounds, so that you hear the sounds and respond to them like the rest of us.
- We would ask you to make sure a continuous and nice sound is played over long periods of time. The easiest way to do this is overnight when you are sleeping and we would ask you to make sure you hear the nice sounds from bedtime until morning. This helps your hearing to **recalibrate** its sensitivity towards sounds.
- The volume you need to listen to the sound is set to “comfortable listening level”; not so noisy that it disturbs the household, and not so quiet that you are straining to hear it.
- For this treatment to work, you would need to listen to the sound **every night** for at least six months.

The two ways to obtain sound for recalibration are:

Option 1: App downloaded to your phone or tablet

There are a variety of “environmental sounds” apps suitable which can be downloaded free onto a device. We know of the following two because they are made by companies that we work with in the Audiology services.



Resound Relief - www.resound.com/en-US/hearing-aids/apps/relief-app

This app offers a library of sound therapy files and lets you create your own sounds from environmental sounds and small pieces of music.



Starkey Relax – www.starkey.com/blog/2015/05/Relax-Tinnitus-App-New

This app allows you to customise 12 relief sounds by changing the sounds’ volume and pitch, providing your own personalised sound.

Note: Your parents/carers may be concerned about using technology overnight in your room. Some people have found using a Bluetooth Speaker inside their room helpful (with the paired device outside of their room).

Option 2: Using a night-time sound enrichment device

These tend to be relaxation devices for many different conditions such as stress, problems sleeping and a condition called Tinnitus. The sounds that these devices make are very helpful in helping sensitivities towards sounds. Devices can be purchased online.

Some examples of the type of product available can be viewed using the links below:

www.connevans.co.uk/product/1447936/14WELLC/Wellcare-Naturecare-Tinnitus-Sound-Relaxer

www.connevans.co.uk/catalogue/27074666/Tinnitus-sound-relaxers

www.connevans.co.uk/catalogue/27074667/Pillow-speakers-for-Sleep-or-Tinnitus-therapy

Note: if you have a strong dislike of any of the suggested sounds, use of a fan in the room or a sensory light (if you have one at home) which make a continuous background noise can be used as alternative sound sources.

So far

- We have received a sound sensitivity referral from a professional who has seen you recently
- We have sent you this booklet that explains what sound sensitivity is and how to help
- We are asking you to follow the **behaviour management** and **recalibration** advice in this booklet for six months.

“The very good news is that when given appropriate help, we would expect a child with sound sensitivity to improve. Sound sensitivity does not need to continue forever.”

What next...

We will contact you by letter after six months to ask how you think you have improved.

Interpretation and translation

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.

Further information

Contact telephone number: **0131 536 3468**

