

Hearing sensitivity in children

It is common for children to dislike some everyday sounds, particularly loud ones, for example fire alarms, vacuum cleaners, noisy traffic. Generally sensitivity to sounds improves on its own. Below are some tips on how to manage it:

- Reduction in the fear of or distress with the sounds is important. A child can be anxious about noisy situations, which in turn can make the problem worse.
- It is very important that all the carers manage a child with sensitivity to sounds in the same way.
- If a child becomes upset by a sound, move the child away from the sound source if possible and then **comfort** and **reassure** them.
- Try to **explain** the **source** of the sound to the child.
- The child's reaction will often reduce if they can have some **control** over the sounds. So encourage the child to clap their own hands, to play with noise makers or to start and stop the vacuum cleaner at home.
- **Repeated gentle exposure** to the noise may help the child to get used to the sound. You could record one or more of the problem sounds (e.g laughter, clapping, thunder, sirens, and machine-noise) and help your child to switch the recorder to a very low volume. YouTube will also have recordings of useful sounds that you can play. Gradually over a period of days or weeks the volume can be increased. Practice with the sounds while playing so that the child can have some control, and this will help break the association of that sound with fear. This is not the same as experiencing the same sound unexpectedly, as people with sensitivity to sounds do say that they can often cope better if they are warned that a sound is about to occur, but it is helpful.
- Children should **not be forced to stay** in a situation that is obviously very upsetting. This may make them more fearful of a specific situation. If that happens gradually get the child used to the situation, with time and care.
- The use of ear plugs or ear muffs should be **avoided**, as it often makes the situation worse.

(Adapted from Josephine Marriage PhD)