

## CARE & LEARNING SERVICE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE FOR

### DEALING WITH SOUND SENSITIVITY

#### What factors may be involved?

- Person finds sounds uncomfortable due to increased sensitivity
- Understanding where sounds are coming from and what they are and why they are so loud (eg a fire engine makes sound to get other traffic to move out of the way)

#### What might help?

**Working on altering reactions to sound:** This will take a considerable amount of work and effort – select a time when you can give a definite focus to this

In everyday life there are noises; look for opportunities to change the negative experiences into more positive experiences in relation to sounds

Some children make noises such as humming whilst working to enhance/aid focus; it can be helpful to allow/encourage this

Share information about reactions to sounds between environments, such as home/school

#### Changes that can be made in the environment

In places where the child is regularly at school/home:

- Have a quiet space to which they can retreat, such as a tent, dance sac, quiet corner
- Consider the furnishing – soft surfaces absorb sound and hard surfaces reflect sound; placing a rug on a laminate floor would create a quieter environment
- Planned quiet times (on visual schedule) – where possible quiet/silent work for whole class, consider short structured relaxation times
- To teach and give child experience of using a signal card which will allow them to move into a quieter area for an agreed time
- When entering a situation plan and structure the natural exposure to sound
- Let them know how long the sounds are likely to last
- Encourage them to tell you when they have had enough of the sound and want to move out of the situation

### **For children with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)**

**Use/create a social story** to help the child understand what the noise is about, what the different sounds people make mean, eg sometimes a child may feel they are being laughed at. A person with ASD may need assistance to understand that it is more likely that the people laughing are telling a funny story or sharing a joke; a social story can assist in creating a more accurate understanding.

**Give** them a clear time frame and support (such as a sand timer) to allow them to see the passing of the time; do your best to stick with the time you have given.

**Use a visual timetable** and refer to this during the event – child may benefit from carrying this.

**Give** clear information about what they can do in the situation they find unpleasant such as:

**Chewing, sucking, blowing** can be ways of calming the body (similar to babies being soothed via a dummy); chewing dried fruit, sucking/blowing water through a straw, using items that are designed to chew.

**Use firm consistent pressure**, eg child pressing their hands firmly together, if seated, chair push ups, pushing trolley, use a rucksack with heavy items (not more than 10% of body weight - strap securely and evenly).

**Provide rewards** records of achievement (such as scrap books and certificates)

### **Yourself?**

It is important to be aware that children will listen to information about themselves whilst in some situations, it will be needed for you to explain that your child has a difficulty with responding to sounds, if they hear this frequently this may reinforce and become what they expect making it harder for them to change.

**An alternative to describing they find sound difficult would be to, look for situations where the child has managed better and express they have dealt with the situation well on that occasion.**

### **Activities that could be beneficial**

Situations in which your child can have control over disliked sound will be helpful, eg having an alarm that they do not like and them being able to put the alarm at a distance from themselves or to turn it off.

Planned, controlled and monitored challenges to sound sensitivity, such as:

- Sound Lotto
- Let the child have sounds that they can make gradually louder (via recorded sound, musical instruments – being used by others as well child)
- Scrap book showing times/event where they did well
- Use videos with good role models
- Involve your child in creating videos about sounds
- Role play positive responses to noisy situations
- Hide and seek with a ticking clock/toy that makes sound

**The above activities are likely to be difficult, therefore it is suggested that easier/more enjoyable activities are carried out both before and after the activities working on sound sensitivity.**

### **Use of headphones/iPods**

Where at all possible avoid use of headphones. Blocking out noise will over time make the child's hearing system more sensitive.

If you are feeling that headphones are needed, it is much better to provide equipment which will give the child's ears some sound, such as music. Where at all possible try to ensure that there is some sound available for the child. If the sound can be heard outside the headphones this is too loud.

### **Past responses to headphones have varied including:**

- Once introduced to headphones, children have been reluctant to remove even at lower noise levels.
- Children have been able to wear the headphones during certain/noisy situations with clear adult support/direction. Some children have been able to put on the headphones for noisy periods and have independently removed headphones when noise levels are lowered.

### **When a child has another condition as well as sound sensitivity:**

The advice that is in place for other conditions, such as Autism may differ from advice about management about sound sensitivity; this is because there are different ways of managing Autism and sound sensitivity.

In these situations information and advice should be discussed within the multi disciplinary team around the child.