

Recommendations for the use of Ear Defenders



Young children typically have more sensitive hearing than adults.

Ear defenders can be used to mask environmental sounds. They are recommended for use for young children exposed to loud sounds, e.g. at an air show, or festival where there is loud noise or music. They are also used to support CYP who become stressed, frightened or freeze when they encounter a loud, unexpected sound.

Ear defenders are widely available from the internet and should cost between

£10.00 - £20.00.

To ensure that ear defenders are not overused and become a tool by which CYP can live apart from their environment in a sound 'bubble', some basic recommendations are made below:

- Limit wear, to critical events such as the talking journey to/from school, going into the school dining room or assembly, being near a busy road, going into a public toilet where there are hand driers, or when the vacuum cleaner/food mixer is used. (see desensitisation)
- Wear for 5 minutes and see if the CYP can tolerate their removal. If not allow another 5 minutes
- When taken off place the ear defenders where the CYP can reach them and put them on if they need them. Easy access to the ear defenders will reduce anxiety that the CYP might experience about possible trigger events, and enable them to have control over their auditory/hearing environment; however, it is important that CYP are exposed to challenging sounds in a way that enables them to learn how to cope with the sounds when not wearing the ear defenders

Desensitisation:

Preparation using calming techniques (tactile and proprioceptive) should always be used. See ['sensory balancing' activities](#) within the proprioception sheet as reference.

In order to desensitise to sounds that cause distress or a defensive response, CYP need to experience the sound in a safe way. The most effective way of desensitising is to record the sound and introduce it to the CYP at a very low volume.

This can be as part of a game, identifying noises, playing sound snap (having pictures of noise events and matching the picture to the sound) or as part of a social story (see links listed below).

Once the CYP is happy with the sound at this very low level, increase the sound slowly, it often works to give the CYP the control of this process. It is **VERY** important not to rush this process as this could increase the anxiety for the CYP.

IF during the desensitisation process the CYP becomes fearful or demonstrates that the noise is becoming more impactful; go back one or two stages in the plan and allow the CYP to recover confidence before moving on again.

Some CYP will need to desensitise to the impact of the sensation of wearing the ear defenders. Again, tactile and proprioceptive preparation can be used effectively to enable the CYP to cope with the impact of the feel of the headphones/ear defenders. Gradually introduce deep pressure touch to the ear area using hands in a firm (non-tickling manner), hold this touch briefly and slowly increase the time thus desensitising the CYP to this sensation.

DO NOT squash the ears. Use social stories to support this process if required.

Note: For older CYP it is possible to use personal music players, with small or large earphones instead of ear defenders to support the CYP when in challenging auditory/sound environments. It is important to protect the CYP's ears if listening to music through headphones. The volume should always be low, as a rule of thumb, if the CYP is listening to music through their headphones an adult should not be able to hear the music at a volume that would enable them to identify the track playing when sitting beside the CYP, if you can hear the music it is **TOO LOUD!** Adults must monitor this to ensure that the volume does not creep up! It is possible with many earphones and music players to limit the volume in the settings.

It is recommended that CYP only listen to music through headphones for short periods of time, see above recommendations for ear defenders. Ideally a CYP will only listen to music at low volume, for a maximum of 30 minutes at a time.

THINK! Safety: Please ensure that your CYP is safe to leave with ear defenders or personal stereos before leaving them unsupervised with these items. Headphones are often connected to the personal stereo/MP3 player etc via a cable; safe use of this must be assessed before parents leave their CYP with these items. If there is any doubt do not allow your CYP to use these items without being supervised by yourself or another responsible adult.

Schools THINK! According to Bromley, Hare, Davison and Emerson (2004), 70% of CYP who have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are hyper-sensitive to auditory stimuli. Dickie, Baranet, Shultz, Watson and McComish (2009), found that for this population, common triggers for extreme responses to auditory stimuli included fire alarms. Schools should consider planning fire alarm tests when these CYP are NOT close to alarms e.g. in the classroom or moving along corridors but are outside on the playing field or playground. If the CYP wears ear defenders/headphones, ensure that they will be wearing them at the time of the fire alarm test/drill. This simple strategy will enable the CYP to experience the fire alarm test/drill without causing undue distress that will impact upon the CYP for the rest of the school

day. Experience shows that once a CYP with ASD has been distressed by the experience of the fire alarm test/drill this can become a repetitive anxiety that impacts on the CYP daily for a long period of time. This will then influence the CYP's ability to focus and attend to lessons.

Links:

Ear defenders:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Edz-Kidz-Ear-Defenders-Blue/dp/B001D0YI7M>

<https://www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk> › *Special Needs Daily Living*

Social stories:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk>

Sound Games:

Letters and sounds (environmental sounds lotto) by lbuzzybea ...

<https://www.tes.com/teaching.../letters-and-sounds-environmental-sounds-lotto-60377...>

<https://www.yellow-door.net/products/tune-into-environmental-sounds/>

www.sparklebox.co.uk › *Literacy* › *Alphabet and Phonics*

Tune In to Environmental Sounds Listening Game CD; Or similar approximately: £15.00

References:

Ikuta, N., Iwanaga, R., Tokunaga, A., Nakane, H., Tanaka, K., Tanaka, G. (2016) Effectiveness of earmuffs and noise-cancelling headphones for coping with hyper-reactivity to auditory stimuli in children with autistic spectrum disorder: a preliminary study. *Hong Kong Journal of Occupational Therapy* 28, 24-32.

Bromley, J., Hare, D. J., Davison, K., & Emerson, E. (2004). Mothers supporting children with Autistic Spectrum disorders. *Autism*, 8, 409-423.

Dickie, V. A., Baranek, G. T., Schulttz, B., Watson, L. R., & McComish, C. S. (2009). Parent reports of sensory experiences of preschool children with and without autism: a qualitative study. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63, 172-181.