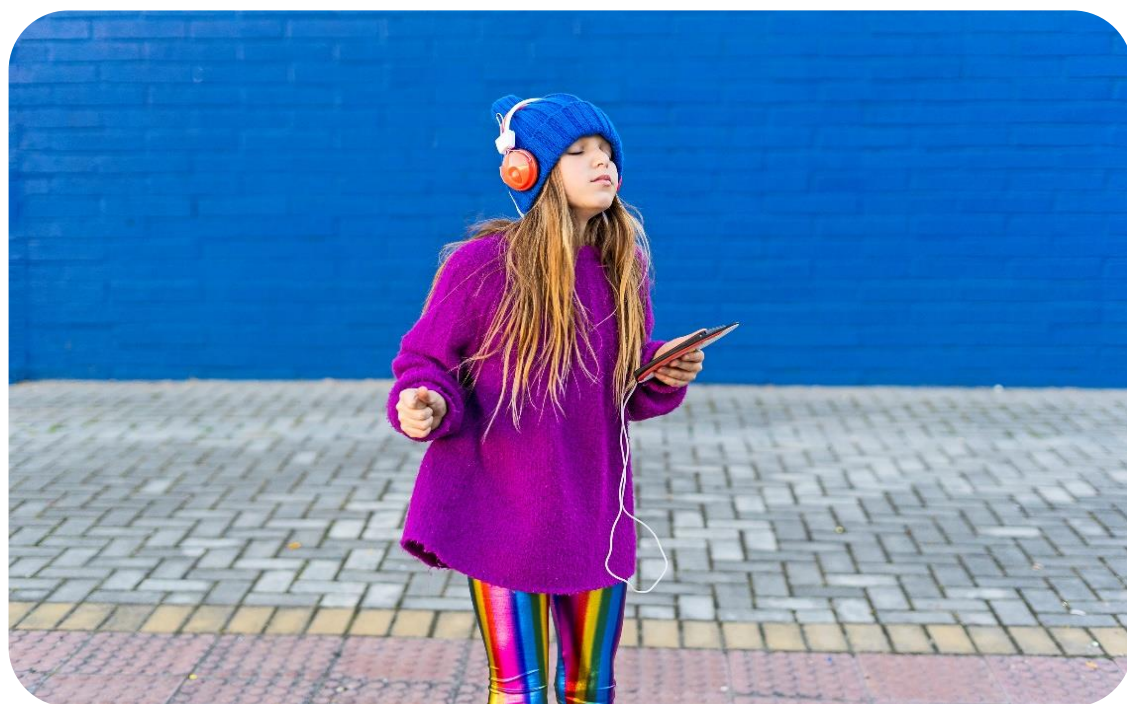




# Humber Sensory Processing Service

Community Services for Children  
aged 0-18 years



Advice for auditory sensitivity



People who experience auditory sensitivity might be more aware of different sounds, find certain pitches or tones alarming, and become easily overwhelmed by lots of loud or complex noise. This may lead to someone wanting to avoid busy environments like school or the supermarket. Children with auditory sensitivity are often very happy making lots of their own noise or listening to loud music they enjoy. This might seem contradictory, but being in control of creating the noise, makes it predictable and therefore reassuring. The way we perceive sounds changes when we are over-alert, stressed or feeling anxious, we may lose the ability to listen attentively to other people and what they are saying, this is because our bodies are in “survival mode”. When children are over-alert, they can often display stress response behaviours such as hitting out. It is important to talk about these stress responses when children are back in a calm-alert state, and when they are more able to listen.

## Strategies for auditory sensitivity

- Trial ear defenders. To engage your child positively, you can customise them using stickers or demonstrate them on a teddy before your child trials wearing them.
- If your child finds it tricky to wear things on or over their head, you will need to build their tolerance for ear defenders slowly. Applying ‘head squishes’ before trying headphones may help.
- Inner ear defenders may be a more discreet way to block out noise and there are a variety of sizes and styles available. Some also come with the option of additional filters which block out more noise when needed. They are available for six years and above, but this depends on the manufacturer.
- If your child likes music, they may prefer to wear earphones and listen to music they enjoy when in challenging or loud environments. You can also try playing single-layered sound, such as white noise or nature sounds if music is overstimulating for your child.



- Ear buds or blue tooth earphones can be a more discreet way to listen music at a low level.
- Your child may choose to wear a hat or have their hood up to dampen noise.
- Bone conducting earphones can also be a good way to listen to music without entirely blocking out sounds from the environment.
- Headband earphones may be a more comfortable alternative and come in a variety of styles and colours.
- Headband earphones can also be used during sleep. They are comfortable and do not expose others to the sounds (please use these with caution, assess potential risks and follow the manufacturer's instructions).
- If your child needs to concentrate on a task and finds lyrics distracting, a 'Lofi' playlist might be helpful. This is a compilation of music without lyrics and can be found for free on YouTube and Spotify.
- Engaging your child in proprioceptive activities regularly can help to regulate their nervous system and calm their other senses, including their auditory sense.
- Have the opportunity for your child to access a quiet space can help. For example, when you are out of the house, identify a quiet area like a café that they can access to break up the busy noise input. This may also help when at a family gathering or a restaurant – try going outside for a short period.
- Your child may not be able to listen to you if there is background noise happening.

Please be aware that these strategies should not be used constantly. If they are overused, it can reduce your child's tolerance due to a lack of comfortable exposure. This can then increase your child's auditory sensitivity. They should only be used as a strategy in challenging environments.



**"High pitched noises like fire alarms can be painful. It makes me screw up my face and cover my ears. On days I don't feel well, it has even made me cry.**

**Putting on my headphones when I know there is a fire drill has really helped."**

## Strategies for school

- In a classroom setting, allow children with auditory sensitivities to sit away from noise distractions – for some this may be the teacher typing on a computer, or the humming from strip lighting.
- Children with auditory sensitivities may be overwhelmed by the complex noises of the school environment. Try and provide a quiet area for them to access throughout the day to prevent feelings of overwhelm from rising unnoticed.
- A child may benefit from visual cues to help them take in information.
- They may find it difficult to participate in group work and discussions due to a rise in noise levels, think about helping them with this by offering the opportunity to go into a quieter area or be able to engage in regulating strategies.
- Where possible, create a quiet space for children to access when they are overwhelmed, e.g., the school library or quiet corner of the classroom.



- Flushing toilets and hand dryers can make the bathrooms at school very noisy. Allow children to use the bathroom at times which are likely to be less busy and make sure paper towels are provided as an alternative to a hand dryer.
- Break times may be an especially noisy time at school, and having a quiet place to access may be beneficial.
- Agree on a way a child can discreetly communicate to staff that they need to use their ear defenders, earphones, or to access a quiet space. This signal could be a simple gesture, or in the form of a card they can display on their workspace. Some children may not recognise they need them and may require a prompt to put them on.
- Warn a child with auditory sensitivities before the fire alarm sounds and prompt them to use any strategies that helps.
- Try not to give too many instructions at once, break down the activity to make it less complicated.
- Access to regulating strategies will help a child cope with auditory input so that they are better able to concentrate and attend to tasks.



For more advice and strategies like this, you can visit our website:  
**[sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk](https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk)**

Or you can contact us with a question on the email address below:  
**[hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net](mailto:hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net)**

