

Children and Loud Noises

Community Paediatric Audiology Service



Young children, particularly between the ages of 2 – 6 years, are often described as disliking loud and sudden sounds. They may cover their ears, complain, cry or want to run away.

This is often an understandable and natural reaction. The world can be a noisy and confusing place to a young child. They do not have the experiences an older child or adult might have. They may think that the loud noise is a threat or danger. It is a good survival instinct.

Some of the sounds most frequently noted to upset young children:

- Hoover
- Balloons popping
- Discos, loud music and parties
- Clapping
- Lorries
- Shouting
- Fireworks

What causes it?

Usually, your child's reaction is a result of their anxiety about a particular noise. It may have frightened them the first time they heard it. Now, they associate the noise with fear.

Rarely, some children have a condition that causes them to have pain or discomfort with everyday loud sounds. This is different to what is described in this handout. If you feel your child is experiencing physical pain rather than just being frightened, speak to a professional. There may be help available.

The suggestions below are to help young children who have developed a fear of a particular sound or situation.

What you can do to help

It is important to know exactly what sounds trigger a negative reaction. The most practical and helpful thing you can do is to warn your child when the noise is likely to occur.

If your child becomes distressed at a certain sound, move them away from the sound (if possible). Then comfort and reassure them. Do not punish them. Once your child is settled, try to explain what made the sound and why. Understanding will help to reduce the anxiety.

Often their anxiety can be reduced if they are gently allowed some control over the sound. Make it a game:

If clapping worries your child, try encouraging them to clap their own hands. This can be a fun game when you clap to a rhythm. You can try taping the frightening sound. Then make a game with the recording. Start at a low volume and gradually, over time, increase the volume. Help them become less frightened, by making it part of the fun.

It is important to be gentle and encouraging. You do not want to make your child more frightened of the sound. With time and understanding most children will lose their fear of a sound.

Some situations like loud parties and discos may just be overwhelming to a child. The noise and crowds can be scary, particularly if they are only a few years old. It may be best to avoid these situations until your child is a bit older.

What NOT to do

- DON'T make a big fuss over their reaction.
- DON'T punish them. The calmer you are, the calmer they will be. You do not want to make this one behaviour a negative focus.
- DON'T force your child to be exposed to these sounds. You want to reduce their anxiety. Be gentle and try to explain what is happening in a way they will understand. Give them control of the sound. Make it a game.
- DON'T think they are just being awkward. They are likely to be truly frightened. Remember that loud and sudden noises are scary. A child needs to be taught how and why a noise is being made.

Need more advice?

If you need further advice, speak to your Child and Family Nurse team. They may be able to give you more suggestions. Also, feel free to contact the Audiology service if you have any further questions.

For further information about this service contact:

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