



AUDITORY

Recommendations

Developmental trauma can significantly impact auditory processing by heightening the brain's sensitivity to sound, often leading to hypervigilance or difficulty filtering background noise. This heightened state can make everyday sounds feel overwhelming or threatening, impairing the ability to focus, interpret, and respond appropriately to auditory information. Trauma can also disrupt the brain's ability to regulate sensory input, causing delays in processing speech or difficulty understanding tone and intent.

What might you notice

Increased Sensitivity to Sounds: Everyday noises, such as a ticking clock, footsteps, or background chatter, may feel unbearably loud or distressing.

Sudden or unexpected sounds (e.g., a bell ringing or a door slamming) can trigger a heightened stress response.

Difficulty Filtering Sounds:

The child may struggle to focus on a specific sound (e.g., a teacher's voice) while tuning out background noise.

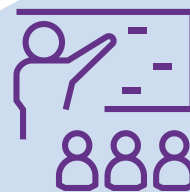
This can result in an overwhelming mix of competing sounds, making the environment feel chaotic.

Misinterpretation of Sounds:

Neutral or non-threatening sounds may be perceived as threatening, contributing to feelings of anxiety or fear.

Avoidance or Withdrawal:

The child may avoid noisy environments or cover their ears to manage auditory overload. The child may have learnt that certain behaviours lead to them being removed from the overwhelming environment.



Impact on learning

Challenges with Attention and Learning

Difficulty focusing on verbal instructions or classroom discussions due to competing background noises.

The child may miss key information or become confused about tasks.

Behavioural Responses

The child may appear distracted, restless, or disengaged as they attempt to manage auditory overload.

They might act out or shut down in response to loud or unexpected sounds.

Social Challenges

Difficulty following conversations or group discussions can lead to frustration and withdrawal.

Misinterpreting tone of voice or inflection may result in misunderstandings with peers or teachers.

Emotional and Physical Responses

Constant auditory stress can contribute to fatigue, irritability, or anxiety.

The child may exhibit physical signs of distress, such as covering their ears, fidgeting, or leaving the room.



AUDITORY HACKS

Strategies for children who are sensitive to auditory input

Classroom Environment

- Awareness of Classroom Sounds: Identify and reduce unnecessary sources of noise within the classroom, such as humming fluorescent lights or loud fans.
- Noise Reduction: Use acoustic materials like rugs, curtains, or acoustic panels to dampen sound and reduce echo in the classroom. This can create a quieter, more comfortable atmosphere.
- Quiet Zones: Designate specific areas in the classroom as quiet zones where students can go for a break when they feel overwhelmed by noise. These areas should be calming and free from auditory distractions.
- The teacher should control the noise level in the classroom and reduce background noise if a student is becoming distracted. For example, the teacher should encourage appropriate speaker-listener manners for all students in class – one person talks at a time; others listen quietly.
- Use of white noise machines or sound machines: Introduce a white noise machine to provide consistent background noise that can mask disruptive sounds.

Learning Supports

- Allow Extra Time: Give the child more time between instructions, and avoid immediate repetition of instructions to prevent overwhelming them with auditory information.
- Use of Visual and Written Instructions: Provide visual and written instructions alongside verbal ones to ensure that students have multiple ways to access information.
- Minimise Auditory Distractions: Reduce background noise and distractions when the child needs to concentrate and work. This may involve turning off distracting sources or using headphones.
- Use a visual support to aid understanding of instruction e.g. visual work system, typed notes on a handout, pictures, keeping instructions on board etc.
- Speak clearly, with a moderate rate, and stand in one place, preferably facing the student.

Classroom Position

- Seating Arrangements: Arrange classroom seating strategically. Place students with auditory sensitivities away from noisy sources such as doors, windows, or high-traffic areas.
- Flexible Seating: Offer flexible seating options like alternative seating arrangements (e.g., standing desks) to allow students to choose where they can work best to minimise noise sensitivity.
- Seat student away from classmates who tend to be chatty and noisy
- Offer a portable quiet space: If necessary, allow the child to take their work to a quieter location in the school when noise becomes too overwhelming.
- Create a sensory-friendly workspace: Equip the desk area with calming visual cues, noise-reducing materials, and fidget tools that help with auditory regulation.

Individual Supports

- Ear defenders: Provide ear defenders or loop style earplugs for students who benefit from auditory buffering. These tools can help them focus and reduce sensory overload. These should not be used continuously throughout the day.
- Visual Supports: Use visual schedules and visual cues to help students anticipate transitions and activities. This can reduce anxiety associated with unexpected auditory stimuli.
- Quiet Activities: Incorporate quiet, calming activities into the daily routine, such as reading, drawing, or mindfulness exercises.
- Regular Check-Ins: Check in with students individually to understand their needs and comfort levels, adjusting strategies as necessary.
- Engage in Heavy Work Activities: Incorporate heavy work activities with the child before entering noisy environments
- Pre-emptive support before noisy activities: Prepare the child for upcoming noisy activities, like lunch or PE, by offering strategies for managing the noise in advance.



AUDITORY SNACKS

Soothing sensory strategies to try

Calming Auditory Input

- Nature Sounds
- Soft rain or ocean waves
- Gentle wind rustling leaves
- Birdsong or distant thunder
- Flowing water (streams, fountains)
- Slow, rhythmic instrumental music (classical, acoustic guitar, piano)
- Low-tempo nature-inspired music
- Binaural beats or Solfeggio frequencies
- White, pink, or brown noise
- Soft background hum (fans, air purifiers)
- ASMR-style whispering or soft talking
- Noise-canceling headphones with a preferred playlist
- Audiobooks or slow-paced storytelling
- Familiar voices (recorded messages from caregivers)

Transition Support

- Use visual or tactile cues instead of loud verbal prompts (e.g., a visual schedule, hand signals, or timers).
- Keep the transition environment quiet by minimising background noise (turn off music, reduce chatter).
- Allow the child to transition ahead of the group or at their own pace to avoid noisy crowds.
- Use a consistent transition song with a slow, predictable melody to cue upcoming changes.
- Give advanced warnings (e.g., "In five minutes, we will move to the next activity") using a calm, low voice.
- Provide a visual schedule or a "now-next" board to help the child anticipate the next activity.
- Use social stories or role-play to prepare the child for common transitions.
- Identify specific sounds that trigger distress and adjust accordingly (e.g., using a softer bell or spoken cues instead of loud alarms).
- Give choices where possible, such as allowing the child to signal when they are ready to transition.
- Use silent or visual timers instead of loud alarm sounds.



Voice of the child Questions to ask

- Are there any noises in the classroom that are really annoying?
- What's your favourite noise?
- What's your least favourite noise?
- Are there any noises that you find distracting when you're learning?
- Are there any noises that make your ears hurt?
- Can you hear the teacher when they are talking?
- Are there any other noises in school that make you feel a certain way?

Learning Supports

- Break complicated directions into fewer parts and give the student time to complete the first step before going on to the next part.
- Implement "call and response" activities (e.g., the teacher says, "Ready to listen?" and the child responds with a specific phrase or action).
- Use listening games, such as identifying different sounds or responding to changes in music.
- Incorporate background music (upbeat but not overwhelming) during independent work.

Individual Supports

- Quiet Zones: Designate specific areas in the classroom as quiet zones where students can go for a break when they feel overwhelmed by noise. These areas should be calming and free from auditory distractions.
- Allow the student to use headphones to listen to favourite calming music
- Integrate movement-based learning, such as marching, clapping, or bouncing in time with verbal instructions.

