

Talking Matters

www.talkingmatters.com.au Ph: 8255 7137
Helping your child to reach their potential



Coping with auditory input (sound)

The auditory system involves our detection of sound. In a normally functioning auditory system, the ear will protect itself from loud noises by contracting the muscles of the ear to let more or less sound in. In an auditory system that is not working properly, the child may under-respond and miss sounds or over-respond and become anxious in the presence of sounds.



Processing of sounds involves four parts.

- Firstly it involves awareness of the presence and location of sound.
- Secondly it involves discrimination of the sound from others comparing differences in rate, intensity, duration and pitch.
- Thirdly it involves identification, including attributing a meaning and monitoring the sound.
- Finally it involves ongoing comprehension including remembering and re-using the sound.

Children who experience difficulties with their auditory system may find the following strategies helpful in their day to day life:

- ☺ Try to gain eye contact with the child before speaking to them. Avoid surprising the child or speaking to them from behind where possible.
- ☺ Use visual cues to support what you are saying to them to ensure they have actually heard the message e.g. attaching pictures of the steps involved in an activity to the child's desk.
- ☺ Use a quieter voice to begin with and increase volume if necessary to avoid startling the child.
- ☺ If a child is easily distressed by sound or often interprets speaking normally as shouting, try taking a step back before speaking to them.
- ☺ Children often benefit from having access to a sensory tent outside of their classroom door so they can move away from the busy classroom when they become overwhelmed or when they need to make noise that would distract others.
- ☺ Use short sentences with fewer pieces of information in each sentence.
- ☺ If you need to repeat a message, say it in the same way to avoid the child needing to interpret two separate messages.
- ☺ Have the child repeat the message back that you have said to ensure they understand.



- ☺ Children who are generally sensitive to sound tend to focus in on white noise, appearing to ‘zone out’, in order to reduce their responsiveness to unpleasant sound. As a result they may not initially respond when spoken to. Try to move into the child’s line of vision before speaking to them or remove the white noise for the period of time you need to speak to them.
- ☺ Inconsistent or sudden sounds tend to be distressing for children e.g. school bells or hand dryers turning on. Rhythmic sounds and white noise tend to be calming for children e.g. fans whirring or clocks ticking.
- ☺ As well as focusing on white noise, children may make noise of their own to mask unpleasant or unexpected noises e.g. humming, tapping, constant talking. If the child’s method of masking the noise is inappropriate at the time, redirect them or offer them Ear Defender headphones to cancel the noise.
- ☺ Some children need more sounds to keep themselves alert and engaged. This might look like enjoying tipping things out of boxes, banging things together, clapping, teeth chattering, talking to themselves or humming. Try offering them headphones to play music to themselves, or consider structuring sound activities in between quiet ones e.g. singing, stamping feet, musical instruments or word games like “I went to the beach and I took a ...”
- ☺ Giving the child opportunities for proprioception (through deep pressure or movement activities) will reduce their sensitivity towards sounds and decrease the anxiety they are experiencing.
- ☺ Similarly, giving the child opportunities for proprioception also tends to decrease the amount of sound children will seek if they tend to need more sound.



For more information and to explore your child’s sensory needs, book an appointment with an occupational therapist.

Children with difficulty processing sound often have difficulties with speech, language and literacy skills. If you have concerns about your child’s development or learning in these areas an assessment with a speech pathologist is recommended.

