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Auditory sensitivity

“Toilet refusal can be caused by sensitivity to the sound of bathroom hand dryers.”

Why does this happen?

- Noise overload in schools is a huge issue for children with autism.
- Children with autism often have an under or over reaction to sensory information. This includes auditory information – certain noises only or too much noise.
- Some children find certain noises distracting or irritating. The child might become highly anxious or appear to be in physical pain when exposed to certain sounds.
- Unpredictable sounds, such as a phone ringing or dog barking can cause unusual or fearful reactions.
- Some children make humming noises or squeal in order to mask out a noise that is disturbing them.
- Background noise can be so intrusive and distressing the child cannot concentrate. The child may be unable to filter out this background noise and pay attention to what is being said. Low level noise can also be a problem, eg. air conditioner or computer humming, clock ticking.

What you can do

- Try to keep background noise to a minimum. Some problem noises can be easily fixed, ie. replace rubber tips on chair legs to avoid them scraping on the floor. However other background noises that may cause a problem can be things that most people filter out, such as the hum of fluorescent lights, bathroom hand dryers, aeroplanes passing overhead, lawnmowers etc. It will be necessary to gradually desensitise the child to these sounds, increase his ability to cope and act appropriately when this occurs. Consult an occupational therapist for advice.
- Teach parts of the body and emotions to help the child develop an understanding of his senses and feelings. Encourage the child to identify and share his feelings if he is upset – also when he is feeling good!
- Have a quiet area for the child to retreat to when feeling overloaded. See [Creating a safe place](#) for more information.
- Play music the child enjoys to mask out background noise or allow him to listen to music through headphones during individual work.
- Some children tolerate wearing ear plugs or industrial-type ear protectors to filter out excessive noise.