



# Responding to Auditory Sensitivity...

More time at home + more people at home = **more noise at home**. For those of us with kiddos who are a little more sensitive to sounds, this may have been one of the daily struggles to this quarantine season or one of the things you are dreading about the Fourth of July.

Here are some suggestions of things you can do.

## What is going on?

Extreme responses to certain sounds, difficulty concentrating in the presence of background noise, or avoidance of loud places could all be characteristics of 'auditory hypersensitivity'.

Auditory hypersensitivity may occur for a variety of reasons. Young children present this way naturally as their auditory systems are still developing. For others, the reason may be medical in nature, or a side effect of medications. However, for many children, their sensitivity to noises can only be explained by the way their brain processes the noises.

In these children, the area of the brain that receives and filters out noise works differently, struggling to drown out background noises and signaling "danger" or "alert" when no threat is present. This can trigger the nervous system to move into a fight, flight, or freeze response. This often looks like over-exaggerated behaviors, panic, or absolute avoidance.

For these children, their responses are not willful disobedience, but rather a reactionary nervous system response. The good news is you can help by following some of these tips.

1.

### Talk About it in Advance:

If you know a noisy situation is ahead (public restrooms, fireworks, alarms) discuss it with your child in advance and involve them in making a plan. Forewarning and preparation can help ease anxiety.

2.

### Give Options:

Present options that help to muffle the sounds: earbuds, noise-canceling headphones, white noise, or moving to a location further away from the noise are all great options. Check out our *Auditory Sensitivity Toolkit*.

3.

### Heavy Work:

If you know that your child is headed into a noisy environment (grocery store, birthday party, etc.) help to regulate their sensory system ahead of time by giving them some heavy work exercises to do before (jumping, pushing, pulling, crawling).

4.

### Your Response:

Often when our children respond with 'fight, flight, or freeze' reactions it can understandably feel like misbehavior. Remember that your child is already feeling anxiety about the sound itself, your reaction can either intensify or ease that anxiety.