

## USE OF NOISE-CANCELLING EARMUFFS FOR TODDLERS/PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

General Guidelines for Parents and Daycare/School Staff

### Why are Noise-Cancelling Earmuffs Used?

Earmuffs can help your child feel calmer and more comfortable in loud or busy environments. They can prevent overwhelm and help your child stay engaged.

*\*Note that the “noise-cancelling earmuffs” referred to in this document are not the electronic/wired type and cannot be connected to technology. The “ earmuffs” in this document are simply the headbands with foam cushions over the ears to help block out loud sounds (like in the image here). However, some of the same guidelines discussed here about wearing times also apply to noise-cancelling headphones used with technology. For example, the technology headphones should only be worn for the activity that it’s needed for.*



### Who Should Try Noise-Cancelling Earmuffs?

Many children, that are sensitive to noise, react to some sounds. Some children cover their ears or might cry when they hear a certain noise, but they can usually be easily consoled and they can still participate in their regular activities like playing in different environments and going to different events for fun. However, when children have significant auditory sensitivities, they can strongly over-react to noise triggers, and how they respond to noise can interfere in their daily routines.

*For children with significant noise sensitivities, certain sounds can trigger a “fight or flight” reaction and this can present as aggressive behaviours towards the person making noise, or the child trying to hide or escape for the room.* If their trigger noises cannot be avoided, the child could be encouraged to wear noise-cancelling earmuffs to help block out those sounds that cause them to over-react.

### Things to Keep in Mind

- Babies/toddlers/children should be supervised at all times when wearing earmuffs
- The child may **miss important sounds**, like voices or instructions
- It may be **harder to join in** during activities with others when wearing them often
- If used all the time, your child may become **more sensitive to sound** over time
- Overuse of **earmuffs can also cause a dependency on earmuffs; Some children may become more anxious when not wearing earmuffs.**

### Best Way to Use Noise-Cancelling Earmuffs

- Length of wearing time **depends on the activity and the noise level.**
- Earmuffs should only be worn **when needed** and only for the **duration of the noisy activity or event.** For example: **very loud or unpredictable situations** (e.g., assemblies, public places).
- Take breaks from ear muffs when things are **calm and manageable.**
- Encourage your child to **slowly get used to everyday sounds.**
- **If a child is triggered by noise all day, a maximum wearing time may be established by their caregivers.** For example, the child’s caregivers may decide that the child can wear the earmuffs for a maximum of 2 hours at a time. \*However, if there are no trigger noises during this timespan, then the earmuffs should be removed before the 2-hour mark.

### Helpful Tips

- Watch how your child responds and adjust as needed
- Give your child a sense of **choice and control** when possible
- Pair ear muffs with other supports (breaks, routines, calming strategies).
  - Some children, especially as they get older, can be taught coping strategies to help manage their noise sensitivities, such as asking for “ear breaks”.
  - Until the child can ask for ear breaks, the focus should be on modifying the child’s environment to help regulate their sensory system.

For example, create a quiet area for them to go to when needed for quiet time on a regular basis as part of their daily routine – ideally every morning and afternoon.

- The child can also be encouraged to participate in a preferred calming and quiet activity (looking at books, colouring) to do in a quieter corner of the room.

### How to Choose the Correct Noise-Cancelling Earmuffs

- Consider sizing: There are earmuffs made for babies, toddler and younger children
- Consider fit: Some earmuffs have a tighter fit; adjust the earmuffs if able and make sure they are comfortable to wear. For a looser fit, try to stretch the earmuffs for 1-2 days before their use.
- Consider colour/style: Some children might prefer a certain colour or earmuffs with a certain design

### What Can Caregivers Do If the Child Does Not Tolerate Wearing Earmuffs but is Upset by Noise?

If the child doesn't tolerate wearing regular child-size noise-cancelling earmuffs, first try offering soft/plush outdoor earmuffs for the child to wear so they get used to wearing something over their ears. To encourage them to wear the earmuffs, some children might also need:

- modelling from their caregiver or other children wearing earmuffs
- having a favourite stuffy or doll wear the earmuffs
- encouraging the child to look at themselves in the mirror when wearing the earmuffs
- distracting the child with a favourite activity or playing their favourite music while wearing earmuffs

### The Goal and Next Steps

- To help the child feel comfortable **and** build skills to handle different environments over time.
- When wearing noise-cancelling earmuffs, incidences of negative behaviours should be monitored to see if there's a change in their reactivity to noise triggers. If negative behaviours do not improve and earmuffs are not helpful, the use of earmuffs should be discontinued and the other strategies listed above should be considered again.