

Protecting Tender Ears Deaf Awareness Week (21-27 September 2009)



The National Foundation for the Deaf's (NFD) latest survey reveals that preschool children may be exposed to excessive noise levels while at play.

The Deaf Awareness Week 2009 survey of 65 kindergartens, playcentres and Kohanga reo from around the country showed that 20% of children had been affected by a high level of noise, demonstrating behaviours from putting their hands over their ears to being so distressed they cried.

The NFD recognises that there is an opportunity to educate children and their parents on hearing preservation for life. Centre managers and educators can play a crucial role in helping children develop healthy hearing habits that will last a lifetime. NFD initiatives include cooperating with the Early Childhood Council to run seminars aimed at their more than 1,000 early childhood centre members.

The NFD also plans to trial the use of simple visual 'traffic light' style noise meters in EC centres to provide guidance to educators and children on safe noise levels.

Attached are some 'Tips', based on the advice of acoustic specialists and child educators.

We would appreciate your feedback on noise and how you are managing it in your early childhood centre. Please respond to our email – enquiries@nfd.org.nz.

Protecting Tender Ears

Tips for Centre Managers

The National Foundation for the Deaf (NFD) is supporting 'good sound' and the minimisation of risky noise in early childhood centres.

We include some tips here. Of course you will have your own, proven strategies. At the bottom we have provided space for you to give us feedback.

Tips from acoustic specialists:

- Managing the 'café-effect'. In an environment like a café (or in an early childhood centre during a rainy day when all children and adults are inside), where there are a number of groups having their own conversations, it is often difficult to be heard unless you raise your voice. Meaning that everyone has to speak louder – and up goes the noise level. Encourage your educators to get children's attention and speak quietly – so they have to be quiet so they can hear you. So creating a 'reverse café effect'!
- 'Acoustic treatment' of learning spaces (carpet on floors, acoustic tiles on walls and particularly on the ceiling) can have a dramatic effect on controlling noise build-up and sound quality. We suggest that you get estimates from providers – this can be a very cost-effective approach.
- However, in the meantime – you might want to try to create some 'quiet zones' in the centre. Use mats, take away tables and other sound-reflecting surfaces, hang some heavy curtains etc. Of course choose zones that are well removed from outside noise sources (such as traffic or construction), and don't have local noise sources such as disturbed children, alarms or stereos.
- Ensure your educators talk with children about the benefits of having quieter times, and not just at the centre, but also at home.

Your feedback – please let us know what works, and what could work better, in terms of this trial to improving 'good sound' in your centre. Let us know your secrets for success if you found approaches that worked with your children (see contact details below):

Tips for Educators

The National Foundation for the Deaf (NFD) is supporting 'good sound' and the minimisation of risky noise in early childhood centres. We want to encourage hearing for life – yours as well as your children's.

We include some tips here. Of course you will have your own, proven strategies. At the bottom we have provided space for you to give us feedback.

Tips from educators:

- Managing the 'café-effect'. In a noisy environment, like a café, it is often impossible to be heard unless you raise your voice. Meaning that everyone has to speak louder – and up goes the volume. Get children's attention and speak quietly – so they have to be quiet so they can hear you. So creating a 'reverse café effect'!
- When children are working in groups – try to create a noise buffer zone between them – so that the 'buzz' of a productive group doesn't distract or disturb others working on quieter activities.
- Try to avoid spill-over of noise – from outside sand-pit or large toy play areas, or from placing music instruments close to the mat.
- Pace the programme. Go from active and noisier activities to those that are quiet. Some centres ask their children to take shoes off and work in socks, or bring slippers, or work on their own mat for these quieter, more peaceful activities.
- Then use the successful completion of a quieter period as the signal for a bit of boisterous, even noisy play.
- Use cues, such as 'use your inside voice, not your outside voice' to signal when it is appropriate to 'tone it down'.
- Talk with the children about the benefits of having quieter times, and not just at the centre, but also at home. Help them learn by practicing going from loud activities to quiet ones.
- Suggest floor coverings, and plastic chairs. Also cork boards (for display) can have a positive acoustic effect.

Your feedback – please let us know what works, and what could work better, in terms of this trial to improving 'good sound' in your centre. Let us know your secrets for success if you found approaches that worked with your children (see contact details below):



Centre Checklist:

How Listener Friendly is your Centre playroom?

	Yes	No
Noise outside the centre: Is your centre in a quiet area away from external traffic noises such as traffic, construction work, playground, cafeteria, gymnasium, busy hallways, shops etc?		
Noise inside the centre: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have quiet playrooms without noise sources such as fans, heating and cooling systems? • Is the floor carpeted? • Do the windows have curtains? • Do chairs, desks and tables have rubber stops to cut down the noise? 		
Listening skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you evaluate listening skills and provide programmes to strengthen these skills? • Do you make listening fun? 		
Teacher's voice: Are you projecting your voice so that you can be heard in the back of the room?		
Teacher's language: When you speak, do you use clear, concise language?		
Communication: Do you ensure the children understand directions, both spoken and written?		
Hearing tactics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there enough light in the room to aid spoken communication with speech reading? • Do you try to talk face-to-face with your children? 		
How listener friendly do you think your centre is? Do you think you may need to look at ways to make your centre more listener friendly?		