



Knowing about Background Noise

Improving Listening for Children with Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants

Learning to listen takes time and experience. New wearers of hearing aids and cochlear implants benefit from quiet settings to build awareness and comprehension of sounds. Parents using listening and spoken language guide their children's communication by playing, singing, reading, and talking. Background noise impacts those interactions. Families who know about background noise can advocate for making changes to improve listening!

What is background noise?

Background noise is additional sound that interferes with listening to speech or other auditory input. Many places inside and outdoors have background noise. Certain sites such as gyms or high-ceilinged rooms may create echoes or other listening challenges. Examples of background noise are:



Outside Background Noise

Traffic, sirens, airplanes
Rain, wind, nature sounds
Construction, alarms
Loud music, power tools
Crowds, people yelling

Home Background Noise

TVs, video games
Windows open to outside
Appliances, fans
Noisy toys, crying babies
Multiple conversations

School Background Noise

Heating, air conditioning
Hall sounds, loudspeakers
Overhead lights buzzing
Chairs/tables being moved
Many students talking

What can parents do?

Parents can pay careful attention to sounds at home and in places they go with their children. Families can explore varied spaces and possible ways to reduce background noise. Consulting with audiologists or spoken language specialists helps families learn more about listening. Parents can share their awareness and suggestions about background noise with their child's teachers and coaches. Listening at home is enhanced when families:

- Play, talk, and read aloud in quieter places
- Listen to tv or music in home at certain times
- Stay near those talking and move away from noise
- Limit use of appliances when conversing
- Point out sounds for children to notice and enjoy
- Add curtains, carpet, and cushions to absorb sound
- Close windows of rooms and moving cars
- Discuss possible hearing aid and CI settings

What can schools do?

Confer with audiologists, parents and special ed consultants to improve listening environments. Learn how background noise makes it difficult for children using hearing aids or implants to focus on speech and sound. Promote awareness that concentrating to attend, respond, and interact can add stress or fatigue to a child's day. Review how to reduce background noise and improve acoustics throughout the school building. Strategies include:

- Position child close to where teacher instructs
- Guide all students to communicate more clearly
- Avoid discussions at the same time in small groups
- Turn off noisy equipment when not used
- Add area rugs to reduce reverberation
- Keep hallway doors and windows shut
- Use a noise-level monitor to measure room sound
- Get remote mics for teachers' voices to be clear

Involve children in efforts to improve listening situations. Knowing about background noise helps everyone!