

# Helping a Child who is Sensitive to Loud Sounds

## Sensitivity to loud sounds is a common problem for many children

Evidence suggests that up to 15% of children find loud sounds uncomfortable or upsetting. It occurs slightly more often in boys. Loudness discomfort is common but much less of a problem for adults because they have the ability to rationalise sounds and have developed ways to cope.

Children can develop negative thoughts about their experiences of loud noises and as a result make them more difficult to listen to. Whilst children are developing these skills they are much more likely to display their dislike of sounds physically. This could be by covering their ears or crying. They are limited by their language, so may describe a sound as painful rather than uncomfortable. The most commonly reported sounds that children dislike tend to be unexpected noises and those that are outside the child's control.

## Common sounds that children dislike:

- Vacuum cleaners
- Hand dryers
- Sirens
- Bells
- Fireworks
- Roadworks/traffic noise

## Suggestions to help your child

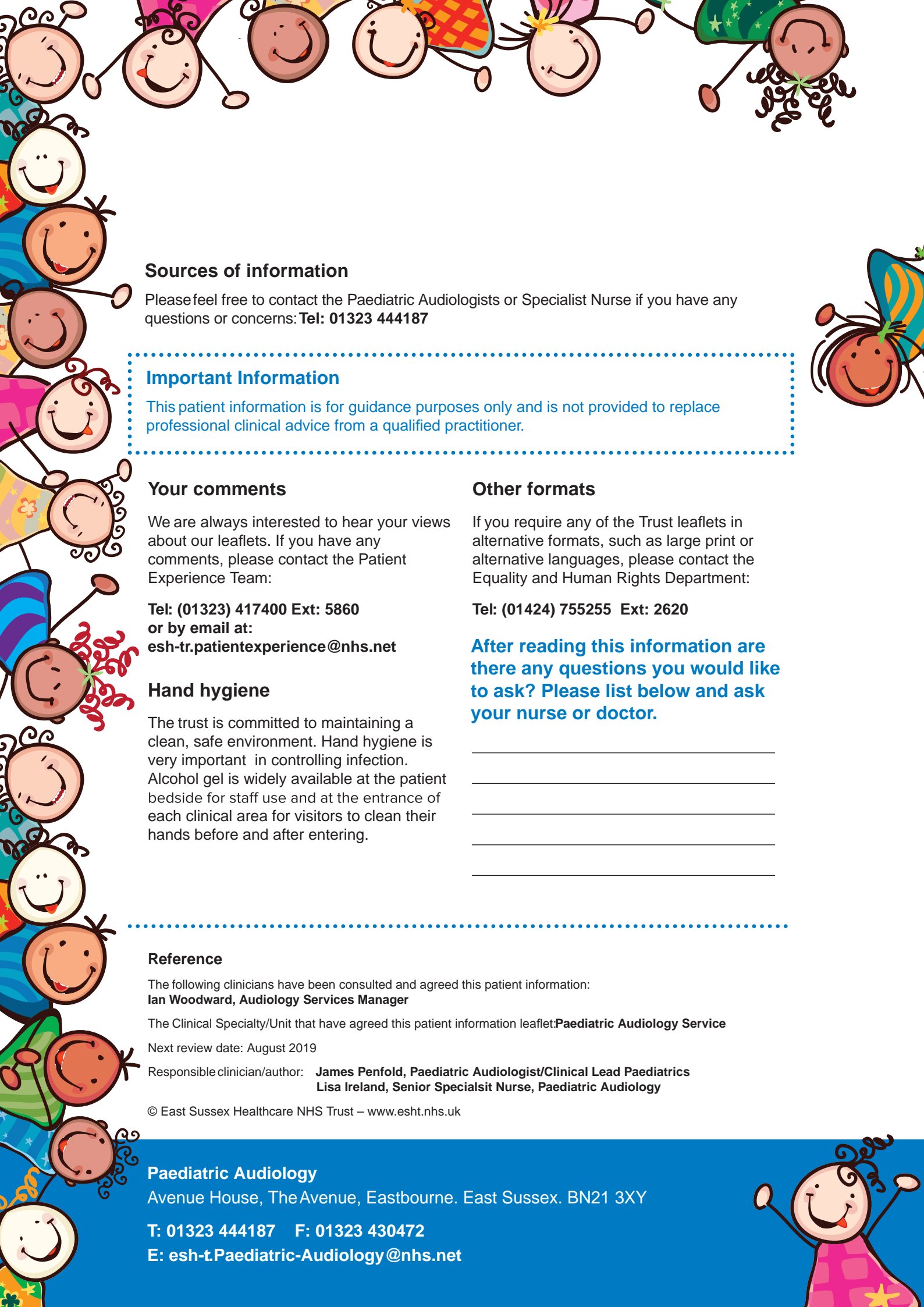
- When your child becomes distressed by a sound, move them away from the sound source if possible, then comfort and reassure them. Be careful not to overreact to your child's response as this may lead them to intensify their reaction to sounds in the future
- Try to explain the source of the sound
- A child's fear reaction will often be diminished if they can exercise some control over the sound
- Repeated gentle exposure to the noise will help your child reduce their anxiety and desensitise the auditory aspect of the sensitivity. You could record the problem sound and listen to the recording at a low volume, gradually increasing the volume over a period of days or weeks. Practice listening to the sounds during play to help break the cycle between sound and fear
- Your child should not be forced to stay in a situation that is causing them obvious distress as this may compound their apprehension and make them associate that situation with pain.
- The use of ear plugs or ear defenders should be avoided except in extreme circumstances, or in the short term. Exposure to normal tolerable sounds is crucial if the ear and the brain are to develop normal sensitivity.

## Paediatric Audiology

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## Sources of information

Please feel free to contact the Paediatric Audiologists or Specialist Nurse if you have any questions or concerns: **Tel: 01323 444187**

## Important Information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team:

**Tel: (01323) 417400 Ext: 5860**  
or by email at:  
[esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

## Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department:

**Tel: (01424) 755255 Ext: 2620**

**After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.**

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:  
**Ian Woodward, Audiology Services Manager**

The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet: **Paediatric Audiology Service**

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