

Managing anxiety in a child with hyperacusis

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Making sense of the child's difficulties

- Organic difficulty + psychological overlay (eg anticipatory anxiety, stresses in the family/school life)?
- Phonophobia aspects - treat as would other phobias - strong evidence base for behavioural desensitisation.
- Be conscious of psychological issues during assessment (eg depression) and refer on to mental health services if necessary.

Hyperacusis symptoms ↔ Life stresses

Making sense of the child's difficulties

- Understanding difficulties in order to develop effective management plans
- Consider the child's
 - Home/ school life and peer relationships
 - Mood/anxiety levels
 - Actions taken by the child and others before/after experience of disliked noises
 - Maintaining factors- eg avoidance, unhelpful cognitions, parental anxiety
- The formulation evolves throughout the work as you gather more information

Case Example

- Details about the case have been altered to protect patient confidentiality

Case Example

- John, aged 5, 2 siblings, lives with both parents
- History of glue ear but currently normal hearing
- Difficulties started when he went to the theatre- unexpected loud noises
- Developed a dislike of a range of sounds including school playground, hairdryer, fireworks. Found the transition from nursery to school hard due to the increase in noise.
- Some loud noises ok- eg TV, lawnmower if in control

- Developed anticipatory anxiety- became hysterical going into places where there was likely to be loud noises eg cinema, even though he wanted to see the film.
- Impact on child and family- avoided cinema, theatre, birthday parties, school discos, caused problems on family holidays. Also presented some difficulties with social situations- did not have many friends, found eye contact difficult, quite shy.

Further details

- Quiet home- Mum does not like noise
- Mum anxious about John's experience of noise- lots of "is that too loud for you?"
"was it alright or was it too loud?"
- John's perspective- talking about fireworks -
"My ears don't like it. Everyone else likes it, but I don't like it. My head gets so loud."

Formulation

- Context

- history of glue ear
- used to a very quiet controlled environment
- developed anticipatory anxiety through exposure to unexpected noises

Maintenance Cycle

- Distress maintained by avoidance, lack of effective coping strategies, anxiety about social situations and also by parental anxiety and dislike of loud noises.
- Anxiety-> attend more to listening experience -> more likely to perceive the sound as damaging/ threatening -> experience the sound as louder, uncontrollable and unbearable

Overview of management plan

- Increase noise exposure- both within his control and in his environment
- Help him develop strategies to manage the anxiety- cognitive and behavioural
- Help mother to develop strategies to manage her anxiety.
- Use of ear protectors initially for instances where the noise level is very loud eg fireworks.

Behavioural aspects of the approach

- Behavioural desensitisation- increasing noisy play, use of musical instruments at increasing volumes- needs to be done every day ideally
- Relaxation strategies- strategies to help him tolerate the noise- can do before/during/after noise exposure- diaphragmatic breathing and deep muscle relaxation
- Use of ear protectors occasionally

Cognitive aspects of the approach – altering self talk

- Preparation- rehearsing the experience through drawing and play- incorporating coping self-talk eg
 - “I can cope with noises”
 - “this is going to be fun”
 - “the noises might be loud but they will not hurt me”
 - “I’m going to stay calm, it’s going to be alright”

Cognitive aspects of the approach – parents

- Explaining the impact of “are you alright or is that too loud?” in terms of John’s perception of the situation.
- Coming up with more helpful alternatives to assist John in staying in anxiety provoking situations eg. “you’re going to be fine, just take a deep breath”.

Outcome

- John no longer avoided activities- went to birthday parties, cinema, chinese new year parade
- "I could hear them [the noises], but I didn't worry about them"
- Became more socially confident and developed a wider circle of friends.

Other ideas and resources

- Narrative approaches – children like stories
 - eg writing a letter to Mr Pain
- Relaxation resource:
www.relaxkids.com