**Preventing Hearing Loss in Kids: Beware of Unsafe Listening Habits During Video Gaming and Other Activities**

*March 3 Is World Hearing Day*

Did you know that more than **1 billion** young people worldwide could develop permanent hearing loss due to unsafe habits while playing video games, listening to music, and attending noisy events such as concerts and festivals?

Regular exposure to sounds that are **too loud** for **too long** can cause irreversible hearing damage. This is called *noise-induced hearing loss.* Children are particularly vulnerable to this form of hearing loss.

The good news is that noise-induced hearing loss is completely preventable by taking some simple protective steps.

**Safe Listening in Children**

Think about the amount of time that your child spends using technology, particularly with their earbuds in or headphones on. For many kids, this adds up to several hours each day.

Here’s what parents and caregivers should know about exposure to this noise and hearing loss:

**How loud is too loud?** Many earbuds, headphones, and smart devices reach volumes of 100 decibels (dB) or higher. Even many headphones that are marketed as “kid safe” reach 85 or 90 dB. This is well beyond a level that’s safe for children’s hearing, which is generally a maximum of 75 dB.

**How long is too long?** The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that children spend no more than 40 hours per week listening to a personal audio device (again, at levels no higher than 75 dB). Although 40 hours per week may sound like a lot, kids often use earbuds or headphones

* in school for doing independent work;
* at home for watching videos or playing video games;
* at home or at athletic venues while playing sports or exercising; and
* even in bed, while they sleep.

This adds up quickly!

March 3 is *World Hearing Day*—which makes this the perfect time to help your kids adopt safer listening habits.

**Tips for parents and caregivers**: The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and the Educational Audiology Association (EAA) share these tips for families:

* **Talk to your child about the importance of hearing protection.** Help them appreciate that their hearing is something they enjoy—it’s worth protecting.
* **Encourage listening breaks every hour when using earbuds or headphones.** Even a few minutes of quiet makes a big difference for healthy ears. The same goes for noisy events such as concerts: Try to step outside every hour for a quick break.
* **Use volume limiters on their devices—if that option is available.** Regardless, teach kids to keep the volume level at no higher than half.
* **Consider purchasing noise-cancelling headphones.** These products reduce outside noise that may be competing with what they’re trying to hear through their headphones, so they don’t need to crank up the volume.
* **Provide plenty of “device-free” time.** This benefits a child’s hearing and also encourages creativity, imagination, learning, physical activity, and more.
* **Use hearing protection at noisy events.** Simple foam earplugs are inexpensive and available at most drugstores. These earplugs offer good protection for older kids and teens. Keep a few pairs in your purse or car. Younger children should use well-fitting earmuffs.
* **Be a good role model.** “Practice what you preach” when it comes to safe listening. Take breaks, keep the volume down, and use earplugs. You’ll protect your own hearing while setting an excellent example for your kids.

**Signs of Hearing Loss**

Do you have concerns about your child’s hearing? About **15% of school-age children in the United States have some degree of hearing loss,** according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Many children don’t have their hearing screened every year, so it’s important to learn the signs of hearing loss. If you notice that your child does any of the following, take them to an audiologist for a hearing evaluation:

* turns the TV volume up to a level that is uncomfortable for others
* says, “Huh?” or “What?” often
* has academic difficulties that can’t be attributed to other causes
* complains of ringing, buzzing, or other noises in their ears

You can also contact your child’s school and ask to be connected to an educational audiologist. Whatever you do, take action if you have concerns. Even a minimal or mild hearing loss can significantly affect a child’s success in school, their interactions with peers, and their behavior if left unaddressed.

For more information, visit [www.asha.org/public](http://www.asha.org/public).