

Prepping autistic or sound-sensitive kids for cicada noise

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As Chicagoans await the emergence of the cicadas, parents of children on the autism spectrum and/or who have sensitivities to sound can take a few steps to prepare for what is expected to be a loud summer.

"Some children on the spectrum can struggle with loud or unexpected noises, such as toilets that automatically flush, fireworks around the Fourth of July or the emergence of a large number of [cicadas](#)," said Dr. Rachel Follmer, assistant professor of developmental behavioral pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and a physician at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

"Sometimes, when they're prepared that something will be loud, they may be better able to tolerate the [sound](#). It's not just that the sound is loud but that it happens unexpectedly.

"If we anticipate the level of noise given the number of cicadas expected, for kids who are noise sensitive, it's something that parents should prepare for."

Dr. Follmer provided some steps parents can take to prepare their children:

- Look at photos of cicadas to explain what they are and why they're emerging
- Watch YouTube videos or listen to audio clips to hear what the cicadas will sound like
- Use social stories (stories that walk a child through an experience in advance) to help children prepare
- Develop a plan of what to do if the sound is too loud, such as having headphones or ear plugs on hand, going back inside or using an AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) device or tools to help the child communicate that it's "too loud."

"Because some children on the spectrum have communication difficulties, they might not be able to explain how they're feeling, so it's helpful to give them tools in advance that may help them to communicate," Dr. Follmer said.

Lastly, Dr. Follmer said it wouldn't hurt to prepare all children for the cicada [noise](#).

"All [children](#) can be sensitive to sound regardless of being on the spectrum," Dr. Follmer said. "The Fourth of July is a perfect example."

Provided by Northwestern University

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