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Misophonia: A Brief Guide for Schools, Parents

This handout is designed to help school counselors, teachers, wellness teams, and parents understand misophonia and implement practical, evidence-informed classroom adjustments. It may be shared freely to support students living with misophonia.

What Is Misophonia?

Misophonia is a neurological condition in which specific everyday sounds trigger an involuntary and extreme emotional and physiological response. These responses are *not a preference, behavior issue, or sensitivity that can be “pushed through.”* Misophonia reactions are *involuntary* and can significantly interfere with a student’s ability to access education without appropriate support.

Common trigger sounds include, but are not limited to, eating noises, breathing, chewing gum, pen clicking, keyboard tapping, or repetitive environmental sounds. Some people are triggered by certain movements or visuals, such as seeing someone chewing, even if not heard.

For affected students, exposure to triggers can cause:

- Acute distress, panic, anger, or disgust
- Difficulty concentrating or completing tasks
- Physical symptoms (e.g., racing heart, nausea, fight-or-flight response)
- Increased risk of anxiety or depression in severe cases
- Avoidance of school or specific classes

Why School Accommodations Matter

Students with misophonia are often academically capable but are limited by their sound environment. Appropriate accommodations:

- Reduce exposure to trigger sounds and associated distress
- Enable sustained focus and participation in classroom learning
- Support consistent attendance, emotional wellbeing, and long-term academic success

Accommodations do *not* provide an unfair advantage; they provide equitable access to learning.

Common and Effective School Accommodations

(Based on parent reports, clinician recommendations, and educational best practices)

- **Formal support plan:** Collaborate with the school counselor to implement a 504 Plan or Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which outlines accommodations to support the student's educational access during the year. These plans are typically reviewed each school year by the counselors and students.
- **Flexible classroom exit:** Students may leave the classroom at any time when triggered to take a brief break.
- **Pre-arranged safe space:** For longer breaks, students have access to a designated, supervised quiet location (e.g., counseling office, library, or agreed-upon classroom).
- **Headphone or earbud use:** Permission to use noise-canceling headphones or earbuds (including AirPods Pro) during class to reduce trigger exposure.
- **Noise-generating hearing aids:** Use of hearing aids that emit neutral sound or white noise to reduce trigger impact (also applicable for standardized testing accommodations).
- **Sound management via device:** Permission to use a phone or device solely to adjust white noise or music needed to remain in class.
- **Assistive listening technology:** Use of a transmitter/receiver system so the student can hear the teacher clearly (teacher wears microphone), reducing background noise.
- **Preferred seating:** Seating arranged in advance with the teacher to minimize exposure to triggers, with flexibility to relocate within the room if needed.
- **Alternative testing location:** Opportunity to take quizzes and exams in a separate, quieter room.
- **Individual proctored testing:** One-to-one testing in a non-triggering environment with a proctor who does not eat, chew gum, or create repetitive noises.
- **Stop-the-clock testing:** Testing time pauses during breaks taken to regulate after trigger exposure, without penalty.
- **Classroom eating restrictions:** No eating, drinking, or gum chewing during class when possible.
- **Access to supportive services during the school day:** Permission to attend school-based supportive services when available (e.g., counseling, skills-based support, or occupational therapy), with flexibility to step out of class as needed. This may support emotional regulation, coping skills, and classroom participation.

How to Obtain Documentation to Support School Accommodations

Schools often require documentation from a qualified professional to support requests for a 504 Plan or similar accommodations. Families may seek supporting documentation from:

- Audiologists
- Psychologists or licensed psychotherapists
- Medical physicians (e.g., pediatricians, psychiatrists)
- Occupational therapists

Not all providers are familiar with misophonia, so families may wish to share educational resources when requesting documentation. A formal diagnosis is not always required for a 504 Plan; eligibility is based on whether a condition substantially limits one or more major life activities (such as learning, concentrating, or emotional regulation in the classroom).

Important Planning Note

Families are encouraged to implement formal accommodations *as early as possible* (e.g., *freshman year*) so they are well-documented prior to applying for standardized testing accommodations through organizations such as the College Board (e.g., SAT, AP exams).

Key Takeaway for Educators

Misophonia is real, serious, and manageable with understanding and flexibility. Small, proactive adjustments can make the difference between a student merely surviving school and being able to fully participate and succeed.

For additional information and resources, visit the Misophonia Association at <https://misophonia-association.org> or attend one of its free virtual clinics held annually.