



What is the Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP)?

It is a listening program designed to:

- Tap into the parasympathetic nervous system (the rest and restore branch of the autonomic nervous system) via the muscles of the inner ear, and in so doing reduce physiological stress (fight / flight activity).
- Improve an individual's social communication behaviours by reducing hearing sensitivities and improving the ability to process human speech

The SSP is a research-based therapy showing results in:

- Social and emotional difficulties
- Auditory sensitivities
- Anxiety and trauma related challenges
- Inattention
- Stressors that impact social engagement

It is helpful for anyone over 18 months with:

- Auditory sensitivities
- Difficulty with regulation
- Social engagement difficulties
- Anxiety
- Difficulties with emotional regulation

SSP is based on the Polyvagal Theory

- The Polyvagal Theory helps us understand what is happening in the body and the nervous system, and use this understanding to change how we feel, think, and connect with others.
- It explains how our sense of safety, or danger and threat, can impact our behaviour.

The Three Key Principles of Polyvagal Theory

1. Neuroception

- Taking in information from the world around us and helping us to assess if we are safe or in danger
- Our body and brain senses what we see, hear, and experience, and responds automatically.

2. Vagus Nerve and Autonomic Nervous System as the Internal Control Centre **The 3 branches:**

Parasympathetic or Ventral Vagal State – our calm state

- We respond to cues of safety and support
- We connect to the world and the people around us
- Looks like: happy, active, interested, socially engaged, focused



- Sympathetic state – We move into action!
 - The world seems unsafe
 - Fight response looks like: rage, anger, irritation, frustration
 - Flight response looks like: panic, fear, anxiety, worry
- Dorsal Vagal – Freeze response
 - The world is dangerous and can be life threatening
 - Also, a response to prolonged exposure to stress and feelings of danger
 - Looks like: shame, helpless, too tired, unmotivated

3. Co-regulation

- Through supported and safe relationships, co-regulation occurs. Co-regulation occurs through warm and safe interactions, providing a person with cues of safety.
- This relies on connecting, supporting and nourishing each other.
- Through co-regulation with others, we can move to a **ventral vagal state** (i.e. ready to engage with others and the world around us).

How does the SSP work?

- The SSP uses sound to tap into our Vagus Nerve which is responsible for rest and digest branch of our nervous system (parasympathetic), and feelings of safety. The SSP helps our nervous system shift into a more regulated state.

Is it the right time for my child to participate?

The SSP is a powerful intervention, and we all have our own unique emotional history, stress load and nervous system. Before your child participates, you need everyone to consider the following, and determine if it is the right time for your child.

- Characteristics of a child who would not be appropriate for remote delivery:
 - Engages in self-injury behaviours
 - Has recently started or changed type/dosage of a psychiatric medication
 - Recently suffered a head injury or experiences significant medical instability
 - Has been or is significantly impacted by COVID-19
 - Is currently experiencing seizures
 - Has a history of significant trauma

General Considerations

- Environment should be safe, relaxed, and positive
 - Guide your child to engage in calming activities
 - Positive co-regulation



- Headphones
 - Your child will need to be comfortable wearing headphones before beginning the program. If they are not yet comfortable with this, talk to your OT to make a plan about ways to support them to adjust to headphones.
 - We recommend over-the-ear (circumaural) headphones for their enclosed nature and the immersive sound experience
- Adaptations
 - If your child is unable to adjust to headphones, some clinicians have found that using Mini O speakers have been tolerated and therapeutically effective.

Listening Schedule

- We recommend that the SSP be delivered for a maximum of 30 minutes per day. The shortest time that it would take to complete the whole program would be ten days.
- It is possible to take it slower based on the client's tolerance.
- Dr. Porges' mantra of "Less is More" guides this recommendation.
- A slower facilitation schedule allows for the nervous system to better process, digest, and integrate the experience.

SSP General Guidelines

- Less is more - Observe your child, watch their response and lessen adjust needed.
- Safe before sound
 - Support your child by creating a safe environment
 - Be mindful of your own regulation and how it impacts your child. Your co-regulating presence is essential for the program to be successful.
- Pace the listening
 - Support your child in taking breaks as needed.
 - If discomfort is felt or observed, it is okay to discontinue a listening session.
- Do not complete the SSP alone
 - Even if your child can be left alone in a room, it is important that they are not alone and that they have an adult who can provide co-regulation and cues of safety with them.
- SSP is not a stand-alone therapy
 - Effects of the SSP must be reinforced by continued therapy and supportive social engagement.

Program Availability:

The Safe and Sound Protocol is only available to existing clients of Spark Therapy Services.

References: <https://integratedlistening.com/ssp-safe-sound-protocol-clinical-resources/>