

Did you hear me?

If your child didn't, he may be developing noise-induced hearing loss.

Listen closely. Can you hear the loud toys, music blaring from the earphones and video game sound effects booming from the speakers? Your tech-savvy kids live in a very noisy planet indeed.

Some of them pay the price: Around 12 per cent of those aged six to 19 have noise-induced hearing loss, declares the American Academy of Audiology. In fact, a study in the *Paediatrics & Child Health* journal calls it a "less than silent" environmental danger.

The good news? This condition is preventable. Dr Annette Ang, consultant at the Department of Otolaryngology at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, explains what to do.

● **HOW LOUD IS LOUD?** Adults and children have similar noise thresholds. Junior's ears will thank you for not subjecting them to levels above 85 decibels, says Dr Ang, citing the recommendation by the National Institutes of Health in the US. That's equivalent to the sound of heavy traffic in the city. In comparison, normal conversation racks up 60 decibels.

● **THE TELLTALE SIGNS** If the noise level is not comfortable for you, it's not going to be for your child. Vibrating walls and floors are sure signs that



you should turn down the volume. And the same goes for music that covers ambient noise, such as the sound of traffic if you're outdoors and the ringing of the telephone when you're indoors.

Noises at home are usually within safe levels, assures Dr Ang. But even exposure to such has to be limited to less than eight hours a day. "I've had patients who wear their headphones while they sleep. That's eight to nine hours of noise exposure. If this goes on for years, the child's hearing may be permanently compromised," she says.

● **SAY WHAT?** Observe the way your young child pronounces high frequency sounds like "s", "f" and "th". If he's still saying "bive", "thix" and "theven" instead of "five", "six" and "seven" after the age of three, he may have hearing problems. For more tips, visit www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders in the US.