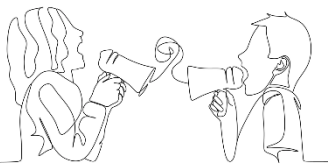
Voice Care for Children



Voice refers to the way we create sound using our breath, our voice box, and our mouth and nose.

Voice problems occur in around 12% of school-aged children. Voice problems can make it difficult for children to be heard or understood, and can have significant impacts on their confidence, self-esteem, and their participation in social and academic activities.

To help children who are experiencing voice problems, here are three key areas to focus on, and some ideas to achieve these goals:

1. Keeping the voice box healthy

These recommendations help to keep the tissues of the voice box moist and supple – not too sticky, not too dry. This helps the voice box to work well.

- ✓ **Drink plenty of water.** 1.5-2 litres across the day. Up to 2.5 litres for active teenagers.
- ✓ **Avoid sugary drinks** e.g. soft drinks, juice.
- ✓ **Avoid caffeine** e.g. coffee, tea, Coca-cola, Redbull.
- ✓ **Eat fruit and vegetables**. The vitamins & minerals in fruit and vegetable help to keep the whole body healthy, including the voice box. Aim for 5 serves per day.
- ✓ **Breath moist air**. You can buy an air-humidifier or place a bowl of water in a safe place near your heater. Steam baths (e.g. breathing in warm air in the shower or leaning over a bowl of hot water) can also be helpful.
- ✓ **Minimise exposure** to smoke, dust, chemical fumes.

2. Reducing strain on the voice

Things to avoid:

These activities can cause damage or inflammation to the voice box:

- × Whispering
- × Coughing or throat-clearing. Try swallowing, sipping water, or sucking on a sugar-free lolly to relieve irritating sensations.
- × Shouting or screaming
- × Loud talking or laughing
- × Too much singing or humming
- × Talking over background noise. Turn down the radio or TV instead of speaking over it. Move to a quieter space to speak if there is a lot of noise you can't turn down (e.g. in a cafe).
- × Impersonations or funny voices

Things to encourage:

These activities can help to minimise damage to the voice box and allow any inflammation or damage to heal:

- ✓ Using a gentle, relaxed voice to speak.
- ✓ Slowing down. You are less likely to strain, and breathing will be more controlled if you speak slowly.
- ✓ Get attention using visual strategies, noise-makers or by tapping the person on the arm.
- ✓ Walk to speak to someone in another room or far away.
- ✓ Voice rest. Make 10-15 mins, 2-3x/day for quiet activity with no speaking. Use gestures or writing if communication is needed.
- ✓ Good posture. Stand or sit up straight while speaking.
- ✓ Get good sleep at night.

3. Increase self-monitoring

It is helpful for children to become aware of both the sound and feeling of their voice, and to notice how they are using their voice at different times during the day. This will help them to understand what makes their voice "good", and then change their behaviour.

- ✓ Be a **Voice Detective**. Observe other people; rate their loudness; notice when they cough/throat-clear. Talk about the sound of other voices. Use words like *smooth, gruff, husky, clear* etc.
- ✓ Model speaking with a "**good voice**". This means no shouting, throat-clearing etc. yourself!
- ✓ **Praise & Prompting**: praise any healthy vocal behaviours you notice. Prompt to fix any unhealthy behaviours.



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