

Voice Strategies

(For School-Aged Youth)

Child voice disorders are most commonly caused by vocal abusive behaviours. Overtime, misuse of the vocal folds can cause them to swell and develop hard callous-like nodules. These **vocal nodules** make it difficult for the vocal folds to vibrate normally, which can change a child's vocal quality.

Symptoms of Vocal Nodules

- Hoarse, rough or breathy voice
- Temporary loss of voice
- Effortful voice
- Voice breaks (voice "cuts out" for a second)

Abusive Vocal Behaviours

- Speaking loudly or excessively
- Crying/tantrums
- Loud singing
- Making sound effects, grunting, animal noises
- Whispering
- Excessive throat clearing and/or coughing
- Poor breath support for speech

Healthy Vocal Habits

- **Quiet Time:** Plan silent activities (e.g. colouring) each day to allow for vocal rest.
- **Hydrate:** Drink plenty of water throughout the day and reduce caffeine intake.
- **Avoid Allergens:** Consider reducing other environmental triggers (e.g. dust, animal hair, smoke, chemicals, perfumes).
- **Inside Voice:** Model a good speaking volume and take turns talking to avoid competing voices. Remind youth to come closer when talking instead of yelling across the room.
- **Breathing:** Use good posture and belly breathing when speaking to avoid tension.
- **Background Noise:** Eliminate or use a low volume for background music/sound (e.g. TV or radio) to avoid the need to talk over environmental sounds.
- **Rest:** Encourage a good night's sleep.
- **Education:** Speak with youth about vocal abuse and how it is harmful to their voice. Help them to come up with other ways they can express themselves.

Please ensure that youth's vocal folds are examined by an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Doctor to rule out other causes that may explain changes in voice.

An ENT report is required before a referral can be made for voice therapy.

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