

Taking Care of Your Child's Voice

Vocal hygiene refers to taking good care of your voice. Even if your voice is already healthy, it is still important to take precautions to protect your voice and keep it strong. Below are some guidelines and tips that can be followed and encouraged at home. By modelling good voice behaviours for your child and positively acknowledging when they are used, you are helping your child take care of their voice.

- 1. Stay hydrated** – Encourage increased intake of water/fluids and reduce your child's caffeine intake (e.g. dark colas, chocolate). When well hydrated, vocal cords produce sound more effectively. More details on recommended fluid intake for your child's age can be found [here](#).
- 2. Model good voice habits** – Talk with normal loudness using an “indoor voice” and slower speaking pace. Avoid yelling or screaming. Teach your child to walk to the listener and then talk, or tap them on the shoulder to get their attention. Encourage turn taking with your child and other family members to decrease increased volume when talking at the same time.
- 3. Sequencing muscle movements** – There may be difficulty with the brain's ability to communicate with speech muscles to achieve coordinated muscle movement during sequencing of speech sounds. This disorder is referred to as developmental apraxia/dyspraxia.
- 4. Take “vocal naps”** – It is important to give your voice a rest especially during or after periods of high usage (i.e. 15 minutes of rest for every hour used). At home, you can encourage this by playing games without words such as ‘Simon Says’ or Charades.
- 5. Avoid exposure to environmental irritants** – Cigarette smoke, dust, chemicals in cleaning products can cause irritation of the vocal folds and should be limited when possible.
- 6. Reduce Vocally Abusive Behaviours** – When possible discourage extremes such as screaming, or talking too loudly in noisy situations. The following are tips to assist with vocal abuse at home.

If Your Child ...	Try ...
Cheers, yells, screams or shouts to express excitement or gain attention	Using whistles, horns, or movements such as clapping or jumping up and down to show excitement. You can also touch someone's arm to get their attention
Coughs or clears their throat often	Providing water to hydrate their vocal folds
Talks loudly over noise	Turning down the TV/radio/hair dryer or move to another room to talk
Uses sound effects (e.g. car zooming, growling, imitating a siren, using cartoon voices, etc.)	Naming the sounds instead or using descriptive words (e.g. beep-beep, zoom, go fast, etc.)
Whispers vs. using normal loudness	To encourage use of a very soft and quiet voice as whispering can strain the voice and be just as damaging as shouting

References: 1. Take Care of Your Child's Voice – Handout – 2. Voice Disorders <https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/v/voice-disorder> - 3. Handy Handouts - Taking Care of Your Child's Voice https://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/571_VocalHygiene.pdf - 4. Suggestions for Parents of Young Children with Voice Problems – What can you and your child do at home? <http://www.nshsc.nshealth.ca/>