

## Voice Disorders

Children with voice disorders have difficulty with the pitch, volume or quality of their voice. Their voice will sound noticeably different in comparison the voices of their peers. Voice disorders may also affect your child’s ability to be understood by others. If your child has a voice disorder, their voice may sound:

- Hoarse, harsh, rough or strained
- Too high or too low
- Too loud or too quiet
- Hyper-nasal (i.e. as if speaking through their nose) or hypo-nasal (i.e. sound stuffed up)
- Or your child may clear their throat or cough often during and/or after talking

### Possible Causes of Voice Disorders in Children

| Individual Factors   | Daily Habits  | Medical Conditions or Illness  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active children who may talk too loudly, use a lot of sound effects and/or scream a lot for extended periods</li> <li>• Shy children who tend to whisper or talk too quietly</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocal misuse/overuse (e.g. talking, shouting or singing for extended periods without vocal rest, frequent throat clearing or coughing)</li> <li>• Limited water intake</li> <li>• Poor sleep habits</li> <li>• Drinking too much caffeine</li> <li>• Exposure to cigarette smoke or dry air</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asthma</li> <li>• Allergies</li> <li>• Upper respiratory illness/ infections</li> <li>• Acid reflux</li> <li>• Chronic mouth breathing which dries out airways</li> <li>• Structural issues with – vocal folds, larynx, enlarged tonsils or adenoids</li> <li>• Cleft palate</li> <li>• Degenerative disorders</li> </ul> |

### When to seek help

- While most voice issues are harmless and disappear on their own, they can sometimes be a symptom of a more severe problem. If your child’s symptoms become worse or do not improve as expected, it is best to speak to your family doctor or ask for a referral to an Ear, Nose and Throat doctor (ENT).
- Your child may also be referred to a **speech-language pathologist**, who in conjunction with an ENT, will work with your child to evaluate their vocal characteristics to determine the severity of the disorder, and develop an appropriate treatment plan if needed.

**References:** 1. Beyond Words Handout – 2. The Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne [https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/factsheets/Voice\\_disorders/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/factsheets/Voice_disorders/) – 3. MyhealthAlberta: “Hoarseness in Children: Care Instructions” – 4. C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital “Voice Disorders” <https://www.mottchildren.org/conditions-treatments/ped-ear-nose-throat/voice-disorders>