



VOICE



What is Voice?

Voice is the sound produced by the vocal cords in the ‘voice box’ (or larynx) which vibrate like the strings of a guitar. The sound is modified by the throat and mouth to produce speech.

Voice has a number of features. These are:

- **Pitch:** how high or low a voice is. We vary our pitch during speech to indicate meaning or emotion, and this is known as intonation.
- **Loudness:** how loud or soft a voice is. We also vary loudness during speech to show emphasis and emotion.
- **Voice Quality:** how clear a voice sounds. A disordered voice may sound strained, hoarse, breathy and rough.
- **Resonance:** modification of voice as it passes through the throat, mouth and nose. Resonance varies between children. Some children may sound like they have a blocked nose (hyponasal), or like there is a lot of air coming out of their noses while speaking (hypernasal).

What is a voice disorder?

Children with voice disorders may display abnormalities in pitch, loudness voice quality and resonance which interfere with their communicative effectiveness. For example, if a child sounded hoarse or husky, or hyponasal all the time, they would be considered to have a voice disorder.

What are the causes of a voice disorder?

Voice disorders may result from a number of different factors. In some cases there may be physical changes that can affect a child's voice, such as:

- infections such as laryngitis, or croup;
- trauma to the vocal organs;
- tumors;
- neurological disorders, such as vocal fold palsy or spasmodic dysphonic.

In other cases misuse of a child's voice (yelling, screaming, excessive use) in an inappropriate manner may result in:

- vocal nodules;
- ulcers;
- inflammation of the vocal folds;
- excess muscle tension.

Additionally, voice disorders may be due to psychological influences or social inappropriateness of voice for the child's age, gender and culture.

What are some facts about voice disorders?

- Some people are more susceptible to voice disorders than others.
- Some vocal nodules can be treated without surgery.
- One of the most common causes of a child's voice disorder is yelling.

What should I do if I think my child has a voice disorder?

If you are concerned about your child's voice please contact a speech pathologist, available at www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au . If your child is school aged their educational facility may provide a speech pathology service. Your child's teacher can give you more details in relation to this service. A speech pathologist is trained to assess your child's voice and determine its appropriateness. If necessary they will work closely with you to treat any voice disorder.

The Royal Children's Hospital consults with clients who require a second opinion due to the complexity of the voice disorder, or children who are inpatients of the Hospital.

What can I do if my child is misusing their voice?

Encourage your child to:

- avoid talking above loud background noise by turning music down or moving away;
- avoid forceful coughing and throat clearing;
- avoid very loud talking, singing, barracking or cheering;
- avoid talking with a cold or flu;
- drink plenty of water to keep the vocal organs well hydrated;
- encourage relaxation and voice rest;
- try to keep away from smoky environments.