

# VOCAL HYGIENE

at home

## VOICE DISORDERS

A voice disorder occurs when voice quality, pitch, and loudness differ or are inappropriate for an individual's age, identified gender, cultural background, or geographic location, and it does not meet an individual's daily needs.

Someone with a voice disorder may present with voice that sounds hoarse, breathy, or like they are losing their voice. It may also feel painful or effortful to talk.

*References: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Voice Disorders. (Practice Portal). Retrieved July 24, 2023, from [www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Clinical-Topics/Voice-Disorders/](http://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Clinical-Topics/Voice-Disorders/).*

## WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

Voice disorders have many different causes, including how an individual uses their voice, lifestyle factors, and medical conditions. Before speech therapy can be initiated your child will need to be seen by an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) doctor. The ENT will inspect your child's vocal tract to determine if their voice issues are caused by a structural deviation or medical condition. If a structural deviation and/or medical condition is present, speech therapy will not be successful until it has been remediated or treated.

SBRS Speech therapy will not be initiated unless an accompanying ENT report is provided. You can request an ENT referral through your primary care doctor.

## HOW A SLP CAN HELP

Once an ENT appointment has occurred and the underlying cause has been identified, a SLP can help your child by:

- Helping you and your child understand what factors contribute to their voice problem.
- Giving you and your child information and advice about their voice .

- Suggesting things that you and your child can do to improve their voice or reduce the impact it is having.
- Teaching you and your child therapy techniques and exercises to improve the quality of their voice.
- Helping educate your child's circle of care (you, your family, your child's school) about your child's voice condition and things they can do to help.

## UNIVERSAL SUGGESTIONS

Review the following strategies with your child to support healthy voice production and decrease behaviours related to vocal strain:

- **Keep your child's vocal folds hydrated!**
  - **Avoid caffeinated drinks** like soda pop and energy drinks. These drinks can dry out and irritate the vocal folds and make it harder for your child to use their voice in a healthy way. If your child does drink the occasional caffeinated beverage, encourage them to drink an extra glass of water during and/or after consuming it.
  - **Use a humidifier** in your child's bedroom to prevent dryness.
  - Encourage your child to **drink plenty of water** to keep their vocal folds hydrated. This corresponds to around 6-8 glasses of water each day.
- **Remind your child not to yell in noisy environments.**
  - Encourage your child to **wait their turn** when multiple people are talking so they don't have to raise their voice to be heard.
  - Encourage your child to **walk over to the person they are hoping to speak with** to get their attention vs. shouting across a room.
  - **Establish 3 volume cues with your child:** one for 'too loud', one for 'too quiet' and one for 'just right'. Use these cues throughout the day to inform your child of their voice volume, and when they need to change it.
  - Remind your child, even when they're angry or upset, to try to use a calm, normal volume voice.
- **Avoid whispering.** Whispering can put strain on the vocal folds. Encourage your child to use a regular volume 'indoor voice' instead.
- If your child regularly clears their throat or coughs, **encourage them to take a drink of water** when they feel the need to do so instead of clearing their throat or coughing.
- When your child is talking, encourage them to **share one idea (sentence) at a time.** Tell them to take a full, deep diaphragmatic (belly) breath before they start their next idea.
- Acid reflux can irritate the vocal folds and negatively impact voice quality.
  - **Avoid eating before bed.** When your child lays down, gravity can no longer assist in keeping the acid down in the stomach where it belongs. Try having your child stay awake, stand, and move around for a few hours after eating and before bed.

- Have your child **sleep on an incline**. Prop your child's head, neck, and upper body up on a few pillows so they are not completely horizontal while sleeping.
- **Avoid carbonated beverages and foods** that upset your child's stomach.
- **Avoid smoky situations**. Smoke irritates the vocal folds and causes them to swell.

## **DIAPHRAGMATIC (BELLY) BREATHING**

Voice and breathing are interrelated. We need adequate breath support to support healthy voice production. Improper or inadequate breath support can put strain on the vocal tract, including the voice folds. We want your child to breath from their diaphragm or belly in order to support adequate breath support for voice. This is often referred to as belly breathing.

During belly breathing, the following should occur:

- During inhalation, the child's belly should expand.
- Their shoulders should not move up and down. If your child's belly does not move, but their shoulders do, they are using something called clavicular breathing which is an inadequate way to support voice.
- Voice is initiated during exhale.

Check out this video to see belly breathing in action:

[youtube.com/watch?v=zz0oE7yfBw8&t=114s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zz0oE7yfBw8&t=114s)