

Information for Parents

Source: Early Support - Helping Every Child Succeed DfES Publication 2005

Voice Disorders

Dysphonia means a voice characterised by abnormal pitch, volume, resonance, quality or a voice which is inappropriate for the age or gender of the speaker.

Children with difficulties in this area sometimes develop a hoarse or croaky voice, or lose their voice altogether.

The reason for this can be medical (disease or infection), physical (straining the voice box muscles) or psychological or emotional (simply being unwilling to speak).

Difficulties with the voice are common in those children who have other difficulties such as hearing impairment, cleft lip/palate or tracheostomy.

Prolonged misuse of the voice can also lead to physical damage to the edges of the vocal folds.

Children who are very loud or shout a lot are more likely to develop a voice disorder.

Vocal nodules, similar to small corns or calluses on the vocal folds, are a common result of physical damage.



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They are caused by persistent shouting or prolonged forcing or straining of the voice.

Whatever the cause of a voice disorder, it's important that your child is referred to a speech and language therapist and to an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) consultant.

It's likely that a child with a voice disorder will need the help of a speech and language therapist, whatever the diagnosis.

Voice therapy may involve working on breathing, pitch, resonance and voice/speech co-ordination.

Things you can do to help include:

- trying to stop your child shouting or whispering (which puts strain on the vocal cords)
- encouraging your child to drink water, rather than coughing to clear their throat
- reducing background noise levels. Your child may find it easier to control their voice when they are not competing with sound from the television or radio
- thinking about how to reduce smoky atmospheres, if there are smokers at home. Cigarette smoke dries out the throat and can contribute to voice disorders.

You may need help putting these measures into practice, as they can be difficult to control for a young child. Any speech and language therapist you are working with should be able to help.