



Help Your Child Use a Soft and Easy Voice

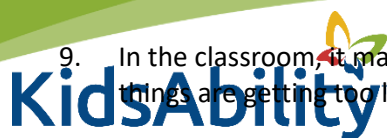
Some children will display a hoarse voice quality as a result of vocal nodules which develop because of chronic misuse and abuse of the vocal cords.

Vocal nodules are small bumps or calluses located on the vocal cords within the larynx in the throat. When the vocal cords are continually slammed together because of excessive loud voice use, cheering, crying, screaming, loud or harsh sound effects during play, etc., abrasion and swelling will often occur on cords. From this, over time, soft calluses or nodules develop on the cords. **If vocal misuse and abuse is discontinued**, the vocal cords are afforded an opportunity to heal, and the nodules are resorbed into the body. If however vocal misuse continues, the nodules can harden as they are calcified by the body. If the nodules become hardened, surgery is required to remove them. For this reason, it is important to help your child learn to regularly use easy, soft vocalizations, and to engage in good vocal hygiene practices, to allow the vocal cords to rest, heal, and resorb the nodules.

Vocal hygiene refers to the habits we need to follow to keep our vocal cords healthy. They are essential, and must be followed daily, when treating vocal nodules. Good vocal hygiene practices include:

1. Have “quiet time” on a daily basis and ensure a good night’s rest.
2. Encourage your child to drink plenty of water during the day. Avoid beverages that contain caffeine, such as cola and iced tea, as caffeine has a drying effect on the body.
3. Eliminate exposure to cigarette smoke.
4. Discourage “sound effects” during play as well as yelling/screaming.
5. Use whistles, clapping, or non-verbal signs/hand signals to get another person’s attention or when cheering for others.
6. Move closer to the other person when talking.
7. Avoid speaking in places where there is background noise. When speaking in background noise it is a natural response to speak louder and with greater effort. To avoid this it may mean that you will need to turn the volume down on the TV or stereo, or avoid speaking for instance in the kitchen when the dishwasher is on.
8. In the classroom, it may be useful to find a quiet corner in the room or step outside of the classroom when speaking with the child. You may also consider placing tennis balls or felt padding on the bottom of classroom chairs to minimize background noise.

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9. In the classroom, it may also help to develop a hand signal or sign to indicate to the entire class when things are getting too loud and to cue the class to use “inside voices.”
10. Encourage your child to wait his turn to speak to avoid talking over others.
11. Teach your child alternatives for expressing his or her anger, such as walking away and speaking to an adult, or hitting a pillow.
12. Parents and teachers: Model soft, easy voice use when interacting with the child.
13. Praise the child when you hear them using their easy, soft voice.

Daily, soft and easy voice practice is also recommended by Speech-Language Pathologists when addressing voice disorders resulting from vocal nodules. Please note that soft voice use **is not whispering**, but rather simply using a quiet voice. Whispering chronically can also hurt the vocal cords.

Here are the steps:

1. Plan ahead, and set aside **15-20 minutes each day for “soft voice practice.”** Having a quiet play-time or story time, during which you and your child will use soft voices, in the morning or before bed may work well for you.
2. **Get out a favourite board game, toy set, or story**, and sit with your child. Before beginning the activity, say: “We are going to play/share the story using quiet voices. If we get excited and want to cheer, let’s clap our hands instead. If we want to make sound effects, then they need to be soft and quiet. Okay? Let’s get started.”
3. Begin the activity, **take turns speaking in a soft voice (but no whispering)**, and praise your child by saying: “I like how quietly you said that,” “You said that with your inside voice,” “Good quiet voice.”

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