

## **Does your child have a cold? No his voice is just husky...or is it?**

Is the quality of our voice like our eye colour...or can it be changed naturally?

Certainly our voice can change in quality when we are sick with a cold or a flu, however, the voice will usually recover to its usual quality after the illness has passed. In some circumstances the quality of a child's voice, in the absence of ill health, can reveal an underlying voice complaint that may need to be assessed and supported by a medical team trained in the voice. Speech Pathologists and Ear, Nose and Throat surgeons are the medical professionals who specialize in assisting adults and children with voice difficulties. Often the Ear, Nose and Throat specialist will examine the child's voice box (larynx) to look at the child's vocal structure to rule out medical problems. The Speech Pathologist listens to a child's voice to determine the vocal movement patterns that may not be functioning at an optimum level or may even be harming the voice.

There are multiple factors to consider when understanding the nature of a child's voice.

Firstly, children share common anatomical structures such as vocal folds (cords), the cartilage that makes up the voice box itself, the windpipe (trachea) and the epiglottis, being the lid that closes over the voice box when we swallow. However, there are unique characteristics from child to child that may affect the sound of their voice quality e.g. some children may grow a web across the vocal cords or may develop a cyst on the vocal fold.

Secondly, when we use our voice to speak and sing we have typical vocal movement patterns that determine how our voices sound. These movement patterns change depending on what we are saying or singing and how we are feeling. Some children may not hold their vocal folds together resulting in a breathy voice making it very difficult for them to get their voice loud. Some children may hold an excessive amount of tension in the vocal muscles resulting in a 'strained' quality to their voice.

Thirdly, the child's nature, their environment and how they use their voice are important to consider. Sometimes children who play using a harsh-noisy voice quality (e.g. monster voices) can develop calluses or vocal nodules on their vocal folds as a result of wear and tear to the delicate tissue of their vocal folds. As the vocal nodules grow larger they make it harder for the vocal folds to come together to produce a clear voice. The child may then strain their voice further to make their voice loud. This strain can lead to further practise of harmful vocal movement patterns making the nodules larger resulting in a progressively worse voice quality.

Early intervention is mandatory to prevent the laying down of vocal movement patterns that can be difficult to change once the child has over practised them into their everyday speech. In most circumstances, it is recommended that the nodules not be removed surgically as there is a risk of the vocal cords being damaged. It is also common to see the nodules return soon after the surgery if the incorrect movement patterns are not corrected by a speech pathologist through voice therapy.

Speech Pathologists trained in voice teach the child the difference between damaging vocal patterns and healthy movement patterns through play activities. The Speech Pathologist shapes the required voice so the child can hear and copy the desired voices in therapy. The new-healthy patterns are then practised to the point that they replace the harmful vocal movement patterns. Children are also taught how to yell safely to prevent harming their voice again...because it is easier than trying to change a child's naturally robust personality.

Tyquin Speech Pathology can assist in the assessment and treatment of your child's voice.

Our ambulance driver, Yeeha Yowee, loses his voice from yelling poorly and is helping Katrine Elliott Patton (Speech Pathologist) to teach children how to yell well and yell safely so he can make his ambulance siren sound again.

