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Voice

Classroom strategies



- ***Teach children the importance of staying hydrated*** by drinking enough water each day. This will help their vocal folds (vocal chords) remain adequately lubricated, which they need to be in order to vibrate efficiently without strain.
- ***Ensure children have access to the recommended amount of water*** for their age across the day. Children need reminders to drink as they may not recognise they are thirsty.

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- ***Teach children how the human voice works*** and that it is important to look after our voices. Lessons such as PHSE, Music, Science or Biology provide opportunities for this, or voice could be a special topic. Ideas to explore and adapt according to age are:
    - The process of respiration (lungs as the power source), phonation (voice box/vocal folds), resonance (in the oral and nasal cavity), and how different speech sounds are produced (by altering airflow and position of the lips, tongue etc.).

Voice

Classroom strategies



- ***Voice contrasts:*** loud/quiet, strained/relaxed, high/low pitch.
- ***Tips for healthy voice*** (e.g. hydration and voice rest).
- ***The appropriate volume for different situations***, such as indoor versus outdoor voice volume. Although whispering may keep noise levels down, it can put strain on the voice, so should not be encouraged.

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- ***How posture affects voice quality and muscle tension***. Discuss and demonstrate healthy posture for speaking, sitting and using IT equipment.
- ***Model healthy voice use*** by avoiding shouting or speaking against background noise. Draw attention to how/why you are doing this. Support this by drawing up rules with the children, such as not interrupting other speakers or shouting between rooms. Visual supports (e.g. posters, visual prompt cards) could be used as a reminder.

Voice

Classroom strategies

- ***Find ways to reduce background noise*** as much as possible. Sound level meter apps are available to monitor classroom noise.
- ***Discuss tips for good turn taking***, model this with other adults and play turn taking games. Emphasise the rule that nobody should be shouting over each other.
- ***Avoid exposing children to dust or chemicals*** in the atmosphere, which could irritate the vocal tract or cause coughing.
- ***Keep an eye out for persistent coughing, gargling, or throat clearing***. These behaviours cause the vocal folds to slam together, which can lead to irritation.

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- ***Reduce the use of loud, vocally demanding games*** that might prompt children to raise their voices and talk over each other. Choose activities/games that help rest the voice, such as painting, drawing, and board games.
- ***Watch out for children using loud, strained vocalisations*** or using their voice in unusual ways (eg. 'robot' voices in play) as this can irritate their vocal tract. Explain how this can be damaging to their voice.
- ***Allow time for children to talk about their worries*** and find ways regulate their emotions as the muscles in the vocal tract can tense up in response to stress and anxiety.

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Voice

For individual children



- ***Adapt the child's environment*** to encourage healthy voice behaviour. For example:
  - Seat the child at the front of the class to reduce the need to speak loudly.
  - Approach the child when you ask them a question, so they don't need to raise their voice.
- ***Plan 'quiet time' into a child's daily timetable*** to facilitate voice rest, such as quiet games/reading.

Voice

For individual children



- Children with voice problems may need additional drink breaks in school if their water bottle cannot be accessed during lessons.
- ***Consider the child's diet*** as fizzy drinks and spicy food may cause acid reflux, which irritates the lining of the vocal tract. This can lead to excess mucus production and coughing, which can strain the vocal folds.

Voice

For individual children

- Some children find it difficult to understand that their vocal behaviours are unhealthy. In this scenario:
  - Ask them to think about whether they are speaking louder than they need for the situation e.g. using an outdoor volume level inside
  - ***Model the child's unhealthy voice behaviour*** and the desired behaviour and ask the child to identify which is health/unhealthy. Once they can recognise the difference, it will be easier for them to make changes. Ask them to copy the 'healthy' way to use their voice and set up situations in which they can try this out with support.
  - ***Use a sticker chart*** to reward healthy voice use and water intake across the day e.g. "I remembered to use my quiet/indoor voice". If done consistently, this can reinforce the desired voice use behaviour so it becomes habitual over time.