

Voice Care for Teachers

Teaching is a **very** vocally demanding profession. In fact, research suggests that teachers are three times more likely to develop voice problems than the general population, with up to 20% of teachers experiencing voice problems each year.

Many factors can impact on the voice including vocal misuse, health, environment, smoking and stress.

- Below are some general tips regarding how teachers can care for their voice:
- Sip plenty of water throughout the day - at least two litres
- Avoid persistent coughing and throat clearing - instead try to swallow, yawn or breathe in through pursed lips
- Have periods of voice rest throughout the day - a period of at least 30 minutes during the working day where you can work without talking at all is ideal
- Avoid yelling, screaming, shouting and barracking - try matching the volume of your voice to the situation at hand
- Talk as quietly as you can *without* whispering
- Use amplification when in outdoor or large spaces, and avoid speaking against background noise. Try to use an amplifier or megaphone where possible
- Attempt to employ non verbal strategies to attract the students' attention or manage behaviour e.g. clapping a rhythm, a colored sign, hands up in air etc.
- Give instructions to a small number of children who then have the responsibility of informing the rest of the class
- Arrange the classroom so that students who are likely to need extra attention are up the front
- Stand in a place in the classroom that makes it easiest for students to hear you; move closer to the students when talking

- Don't speak in an unnatural pitch or voice quality for a prolonged period of time e.g. when reading to children or directing plays
- Try to improve the acoustics in your classroom by using soft furnishings and art work, especially if there are mainly hard surfaces in the room
- Maintain a daily warm up and cool down routine. This need only take 5 minutes and can usually be completed in the car on the way to and from work, or in the classroom just before the students enter. Your Speech Pathologist will give you an individualised program which may include:
 - Voicing the sounds 'm', 'n' and 'ng' on one breath
 - Trilling on your lips and/or tongue, up and down the scale
 - Humming or lip trilling to songs on the radio
- Concentrate on speaking "off" the throat; avoid pushing voice and use optimal posture when projecting.
- If voice is persistently "hoarse", completely rest it for one day over the weekend.

References:

Voice Care for Teachers - DVD - www.voicecareforteachers.com A. Russell, C. Pemberton, J.

Oates

'Introducing the Voice Care for Teachers Program' handbook. Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria. 2000.