

SEE THE
CRY OF THE
CAT VIDEO

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Cheeky smile: Gemma Lister
(right) at home with mum Jodi
and brother Jai.

Picture: IAN CURRIE

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The little girl who sounds like a cat

GEMMA Lister's soft cries in her newborn hospital crib should have been the first indication her life would be different from others — her whimpers sounded like a kitten's meows.

But it took three months before Gemma was diagnosed with rare Cri du chat syndrome, translated from French to "cry of the cat".

Language, intellectual and physical development are affected by an abnormality on Gemma's fifth

BRIGID O'CONNELL
Health reporter

chromosome, which affects between one in 25,000 and one in 50,000 children.

Four years on, the Ferntree Gully girl with the cheeky smile — and whose arms are perpetually outstretched for hugs — continues to speak her few words in the same high-pitched timbre as a cat.

Mother Jodi Lister, who gave birth to son Jai two

years earlier, said she knew something was different with Gemma at birth.

But her worries were put down to post-natal depression and "oversensitivity".

"On our birth video we said, 'Oh, wow, she sounds just like a little kitten'," Mrs Lister said.

"We had the clues, but no idea what was wrong.

"They gave us a pretty poor prognosis. We never knew whether she would

walk. They won't know what life will be like for Gemma until she goes to school, which is still 18 months away for us."

But the family has worked hard to give Gemma the same opportunities as her brother, including piano lessons and karate.

They also have united to help her learn to communicate through a mix of speaking, sign language and pointing at a communication board.

"I feel like my life is a game of charades," Mrs Lister said.

But after starting mainstream kindergarten this year at Bena Angliss, and attending Illoura Early Childhood Intervention Services, Gemma is defying the odds. She is stringing words together, role-playing with toys and learning to socialise.

"She has progressed so much from the start of kinder to now," Mrs Lister said. "You hope your child

gets invited to birthday parties and makes friends — you just want them to be happy. And she's been invited to more parties than we're able to keep up with.

"To see her playing with other children is magical."

An annual family day will be held for other Victorians with Cri du chat in Melbourne on November 6. For details, or to donate, visit www.criduchat.asn.au or ph: 9775 9962.

oconnellb@heraldsun.com.au