

Can you hear me? Looking after your voice

Tips

- **Drink water!** Yes, I know you've heard it before, but it's true. You might be absolutely gagging for the 'necessary' cup of tea or coffee at break time, but they're not good for your voice as they dry you out. And while we're at it, make sure the water isn't too chilled either; you'd not play a game of squash and rush, sweating and hot into a cold shower, so why expect the muscles of your voice to do the equivalent.
- **Get some training.** Do it before you have a problem and you should avoid them. If you do suspect you've got a problem, go and see your GP; explain you're a teacher, but be prepared for them not to necessarily understand the demands of your job. If they simply say "talk less" politely explain why that's difficult for you and see what help they can offer you: you may need referring to an Ear, Nose & Throat specialist, or and Speech & Language Therapist. There's every likelihood you're fine, but better safe than sorry.
- **Use non-verbal signals** to get your class's attention so you don't have to fight about the noise. I know teachers who use hand signals, bells, who just stand in a certain part of the classroom or – so she claims – one who turns off the lights!
- **Try not to breathe in the chalk dust or marker-pen fumes.** Similarly, if you're using something like over-head projectors or computers in your classroom, don't fight the noise they make if you can avoid it; simply stand away from them if at all possible. Beware of the dry, hot air they throw out too: you'll need to drink even more and – conceivably – you might want to firm up the habit of breathing in through your nose when you're near them to moisten the air before it goes down your throat towards your lungs.
- **Turn it around.** If you find yourself having to work in a room where half your students seem to be in the dim and distant reaches, have a good hard look at the ergonomics of your room. Can you turn it around by 90 degrees? If you can teach in it landscape instead of portrait, your voice won't have to throw so far. (Yes, I know there are other problems in doing this, and it's not for everyone, but it's something to think about ...)
- **Don't resort to microphones.** They give you one more thing to worry about, take your mind off your job and – inevitably – make your voice less interesting and flatten out your passion. They also distance you from your students, psychologically and – for some students – simply confuse them because your voice isn't coming from the same place as you're standing. (Of course, if you've got a clinical problem the situation is certainly different, but...

1. Get Physical

- Find the base of your tongue and gently massage it
- Find the mandibular joint (just below the ears) and massage it
- Massage all around the mouth and face
- Stretch the tongue in all directions - point and curl
- Make a range of funny faces
- Shake and flop

2. Learning to breathe!

- Find your diaphragm ... start on the stomach and travel up until you find the bottom of the rib cage
- Gorilla noises to feel the diaphragm (Ook - Ook - Ook)
- Feel your self breathing on your diaphragm
- Find a partner you can trust - and feel each other breathing
- Big breaths and shallow breaths
- Flop and stretch - getting as close to touching your toes, legs spread, as you can (x3)
- Squatting and rising - in singles or in pairs (x3)
- Deep breath in - centre the breath and release on an 'ssssss' (x3)
- Deep breath in - centre the breath and release on an 'zzzzzz' (x3)
- Slow counting 1-10 on a single breath and then 10-1

3. Resonance

- Find a comfortable pitch and hum
- Move the hum to your chest / ribs
- Thump (gently) yourself on the chest, ribs, stomach and back whilst humming
- Hum whilst shaking your hands and legs
- Hum whilst shaking all over
- Hang your head on your chest - hum in your nose / mouth - gently raise your head - move the pitch
- Move the hum around your face / mouth
- Imaging your voice as arrows coming out of your mouth move the direction of the arrows
- Find your "child voice" and move the hum to the top of your head
- Move the hum up and down your body
- Find comfortable pitch and then move around the room until you find someone with the same note

4. Opening up the voice

- Stretch your arm up and over the head to the opposite shoulder - repeat with the other side (x3)
- Move the tone up and down and sing say the word 'half' - use one arm palm up from the shoulder and then two arms whilst repeating this
- Arms by your side find your lowest tone - Ahhh - come up in tones / semi-tones raising your arms as you do
- Repeat this going down

5. Articulation

- Start with some magnificent mastication!
- Point and flatten the tongue
- Little tongue circle
- Big tongue circles
- Blow raspberries
- Make horse noises
- Vocal exercises- up and down your range
 - Aah - Aah - Aah - Aah ...
 - Dah - Dah - Dah - Dah ...
 - Tah - Tah - Tah - Tah ...
 - Mmm - Mmm - Mmm - Mmm ...
 - Nuh - Nuh - Nun - Nun ...
 - Puh - Puh - Puh - Puh ...
 - Fuh - Fuh - Fuh - Fuh ...
 - Yo - Ya - Yo - Ya - Yo - Ya ...
 - Rolling your r's (if you can)
 - Hi - Ya - Hi - Ya - Hi - Ya ...
- Make a two finger space in your mouth
 - Ga - Ga - Ga -Ga ...
 - Ka - Ka - Ka - Ka ...
 - Kiggly - Coo - Kiggly - Coo - Kiggly, Kiggly, Kiggly Coo
- Tongue Twisters
 - Around the ragged rocks the ragged rascal ran
 - I chased a bug around a tree, I'll have his blood he knows I will
 - Do daily deeds diligently
 - Red Lorry, Yellow Lorry
 - How many boards could a Mongol horde hoard if the Mongol horde got really bored?
 - How can a clam cram in a clean cream can?
 - Send toast to ten tense stout snails' ten tall tents
 - Denise sees the fleece, Denise sees the fleas, at least Denise could sneeze and feed and freeze the fleas
 - The thirty-three thieves thought they have thrilled the throne through Thursday
 - Seth at Sainsbury's sells thick socks
 - If Stu chews shoes, should Stu choose the shoes he chews?

Voice and Behaviour Management

Your voice is a very powerful tool and can be used well for behaviour management in classes - a few 'golden rules' are:

- Tape yourself - if you feel your voice is too high work at lowering the pitch a little at a time
- Smile whilst you are talking this this will transmit positive emotions
- Avoid shouting except in emergencies or if there is a real possibility of danger or harm
- Reduce rather than increase the level of your voice - this tends to calm the class
- The emotion of your voice will both transmit and effect the rest of the class - work on the still, small voice of calm
- Wait!
- Non verbals can be as powerful as verbals - develop a series of signals for quiet, listen, hands-up etc..
- If you do need a louder signal then use an artificial aid (e.g. a chime bar)
- Use techniques like "pass it on" so that the children are using their voice as well
- Learn the names - it is a form of magic
- Do not be afraid to speak slowly