

Warming Up the Voice ~~~ For Laughter Yoga Leaders

by Kathy Burns, with Jeffrey Briar

The voice is an essential element for participating in and leading laughter exercises. Laughter is, after all, a wonderful “vocalization!” When used correctly, your vocal instrument will become stronger, richer, and more powerful.

Like any muscle, the vocal chords respond well to: warming up; exercise which starts gently within a small range and gradually expands that range; and consistently correct usage. Conversely, if strained or forced too quickly, the vocal chords can become sore or even injured.

Laughter is a beautiful gift and **does not harm the voice**. Natural laughter comes from deep in our belly, with full involvement of the diaphragm. The throat and vocal chords are loose and energized, expressive yet calm. If you feel strain, laugh with an **open throat from deep down** (“Brooklyn Cab Driver”) instead of up high and nasal (whiny “Jerry Lewis” character).

We urge you to commit to a vocal warm up before leading, and to incorporate vocal exercises as part of the total experience of healthy, unconditional shared laughter. Enjoy!

Elements of Healthy Vocal Hygiene

Relaxed, stretched, nourished and energized; involving the full body
Abdominal breathing (felt into the deep belly)
Throat relaxed
Projection (volume) supported by breath
Rich vocal resonance
Expressive pitch variety
Constant hydration (swallow often, and drink water)

An excellent way to begin your warm up is in a hot steamy bath or shower. **Sing in the shower** – it’s fun!

- * Make **humming sounds** with an open throat (like yawning with the lips closed) – this bathes the chords and gently awakens them.
- * Make **nasal sounds**. These start to stretch the vocalizing muscles while protecting the throat.
- * The **tongue**: alternately roll, extend, bend, and flutter.
- * Open and close the **jaw**, circle it around (while making yawning, growling or singing sounds).
- * Speak **gibberish**.
- * Start by making a **pitch** and **raise it up and down** a small amount. Gradually, over several minutes’ time, increase the range, higher and lower, as you continue.
- * **Sing**, using both traditional vocal warm-ups (“La la la LA la la la; li li li LI li li li, etc.) and “la la la” syllables while singing songs you know (“Twinkle Twinkle”, any national anthem, “Happy Birthday,” etc.). Also sing in gibberish. (Note: Unless you are doing an organized song - which is fine - discourage singing in “real” words, as that can distract the other vocalizers).
- * Relax.
- * Breathe.
- * ... And of course: **Laugh!**

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