

Gender-affirming voice and communication coaching

Fiona Dominick, Speech-language therapist, Te Whatu Ora Hauora a Toi Bay of Plenty

Kia ora e te whānau. Since I last wrote an article for *Communication Matters* on this topic our service provided via Te Whatu Ora Hauora a Toi Bay of Plenty has continued to develop and grow.

In November 2020, Te Whatu Ora Hauora a Toi Bay of Plenty hosted a 2 day Zoom workshop on speech-language therapy practice with trans and gender diverse adults and young people, with experienced clinician Jennifer Oates. I have just completed La Trobe University's Speech Pathology with Trans and Gender Diverse People online course (recommended 70 hours), which I can't recommend enough. In November 2022, I attended the Hui Takatāpui noho marae, with the goal to whakawhanaunga with people and organisations who work in the field of gender-affirming healthcare through an Indigenous lens. For the last five months, I have been running a weekly Zoom clinic on Tuesdays to provide gender-affirming voice coaching to people in the Western Bay of Plenty, in addition to in-person support through my work in the Eastern Bay of Plenty since 2019.

I would like to outline some of the online resources I have found useful in supporting gender-affirming voice coaching, and also offer to facilitate a Gender-Affirming Voice and Communication Coaching SIG moving into 2023. This could be a space where we can share our learning from courses,

have client case discussions, increase our knowledge of current terminology, improve awareness of the experiences of our transgender and gender diverse whānau, discuss assessment and treatment tools, and highlight apps, websites, and online videos that are useful in our work (or anything else the collective wishes to bring to the table!).

If you are interested, please email me at **Fiona.Dominick@bopdhb.govt.nz** to be included in future communications. I plan to send out a Survey Monkey to gather information on what you would like to see included, and suitable timing and frequency of such a SIG.

Overall, I have found that my previous experience working in voice therapy has been extremely useful to draw upon – we as speech-language therapists have a lot of the skills required to do this mahi! It has been hugely rewarding to laugh, cry, and celebrate with clients who describe a life-changing experience, hearing their voice aligning with their gender identity for the first time.

Onto the resources! All of the resources listed here are videos available on Youtube, unless otherwise noted. ●

Voice Feminisation

Introduction videos and creating good habits

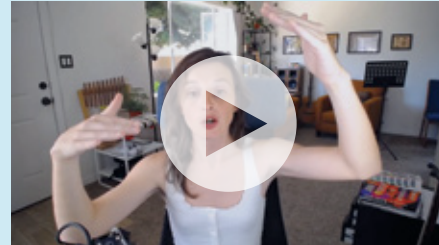
- ▶ TransVoiceLessons:
**Voice Feminization for ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS
How to Get Started Now**
A great pre-appointment introduction to voice feminisation.



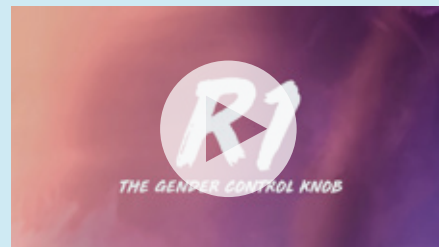
- ▶ Great Speech Inc: Speech Therapy:
Free Exercises for Straw Phonation
This video is presented as a tool for rest and recovery to release any buildup of tension in the throat.
- ▶ Great Speech Inc: Speech Therapy:
Free Exercises for Diaphragmatic Breathing
As we use the voice in new ways, diaphragmatic breathing will minimise strain, and this video is a nice support for what we do in sessions.
- ▶ Melissa Grassia Chisholm the_voice_rehab:
Vocal Function Exercises UPDATED
This video is great for strengthening up the voice and ensuring good breathing and phonation. Clients can run through these five-minute exercises each morning for five weeks (introduced after forward resonance practice, see the next category). I recommend that folks start 46 seconds in, which is where the exercises begin. These exercises also give a space to focus on pitch increases, decreases, and sustaining higher pitches, while focusing on forward resonance/high larynx.

Forward resonance

- ▶ Vox Nova:
Resonance vs. Pitch – Ear Training
Provides a good introduction to ear training and the feeling of forward resonance.



- ▶ TransVoiceLessons:
**The Single MOST Powerful Element of
Voice Feminization: The Gender Dial (R1)**
Forward resonance is often something that I work on in my voice coaching sessions. The concept of forward resonance is explained really well in this video, and there are some great exercises for experimentation with forward resonance. This is my favourite video!



Voice Feminisation (continued)

Intonation

- ▶ The Voice Stylist:
Intonation Work for Male to Female Transgender Voice

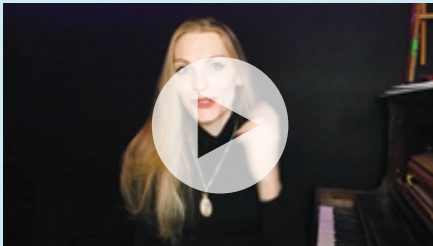
This video gives a nice outline of how to start practicing intonation. It provides contrastive intonation practice, first by saying a sentence in a bored/monotonous way (using anchor pitch), and second by increasing variability.

- ▶ theTerraStarYT Star:
Male to Female Voice Training 05: Pronunciation and Intonation practice

This video provides another aspect of intonation to think about – pitch gliding on vowel sounds. This approach works quite well and can be practiced on sentence lists.

- ▶ Seattle Voice Lab:
How to make your inflection more feminine and the differences between masc. and fem. voices

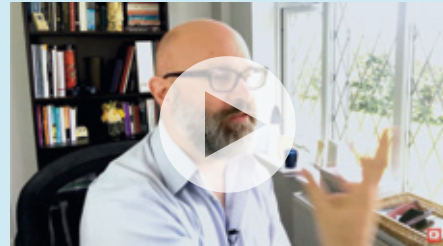
This video provides a good description of perceptual voice intonation characteristics.



Voicing with Volume

- ▶ Jimmy Cannon Speaking Coach:
Voice Practice Exercise #2 – Twang Voice Training For Speaking Louder & Stronger

Practicing twang can increase the volume of the voice. The helpful aspect of twang is that it incorporates a higher larynx as well as upward and forward resonance motion. This is a useful first video explaining twang voice quality.



- ▶ Complete Vocal Technique (website):
What is Twang?

This page explains twang with a nice infographic at the end, featuring seven ways to find twang.

- ▶ Xoey Alexandria:
Voice Feminization – Projection (Advanced)

This is another video introducing twang – warning there is some not-safe-for-work language in this one!

Voice Masculinisation

Introduction videos and back resonance

▶ Trans Vocal Training:
How to Masculinize Your Voice Easily with Darth Vader Breathing (Part 1)

With people seeking voice masculinisation, I begin with using exercises to lower the larynx and create space for 'back resonance'. This technique of 'Darth Vader' breathing has been working really well.



▶ Trans Vocal Training:
Simple Way to Masculinize Your Voice Easily for FtM and Androgynous Voices (Vocal Coach Anna) (Part 3)

This video presents a yawn technique that also works well to establish back resonance.



▶ Home-Speech-Home (website):
250+ K Words, Phrases, Sentences, & Paragraphs Grouped by Place & Syllable

The /k/ sound seems to encourage the back resonance that contributes to voice masculinisation (an inverse to how we use /m/ words, phrases, and sentences to practice voice feminisation). This page is a helpful resource.



As a side note, I want to highlight that people seeking voice masculinisation have a wide range of experiences. We have seen people for voice masculinisation who have not started testosterone yet but are very uncomfortable with their voice, we have seen people who have been on testosterone for ten years and are still not happy with their voice (often resonance is still higher/forward), and we have seen nonbinary folks who wish to sound more masculine but do not wish take testosterone. An open mind and heart is important to ensure a gender-affirming healthcare service does not exclude anyone!

Strategies to build confidence

- “ Write down a hierarchy of speaking situations from most comfortable to most anxiety-provoking, and gradually work through each one.

- “ Chat to people before using new vocal techniques, for example saying “I am working on a voice I feel connected to, I am going to practice using it now”.

- “ Pre-record the voice and share it with trusted and supportive people, for example saying “this is my voice I am working on, what do you think? I’m really nervous about using it”.

- “ Discuss how any voice produced is always real and authentic, because it is coming from someone with a unique personality, experience, and vocal anatomy.

Apps



Voice Tools: Pitch, Tone, & Volume

This is a free app that folks can use to find and monitor a desired pitch and look at variation in intonation. While this can be a useful tool, it can also trigger gender dysphoria for some (the app provides ‘male’ and ‘female’ voice categories), and so it is best used in combination with supportive and encouraging coaching. We usually move away from the app towards hearing and feeling the voice instead.



Christella Voiceup

A paid app for voice feminisation, providing daily practice sessions.



EvaF and EvaM

Paid apps for voice feminisation and masculinisation.



English Speaking Practice

This is a great free app for generalisation, allowing users to converse with a recorded conversation partner. It also has the capability of recording conversations so they can be listened to afterwards. Remember that recording and then listening to the voice needs to be approached with sensitivity, as it could trigger gender dysphoria.