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Promoting Easy Vocal Productions

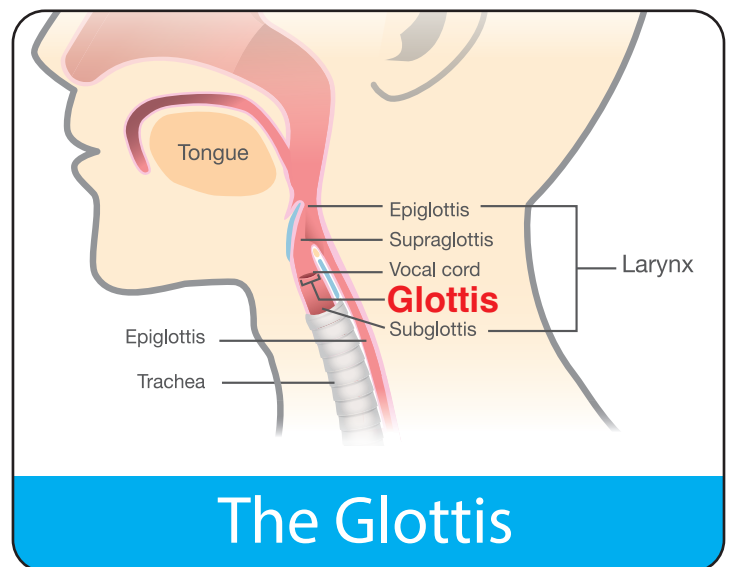
by Kevin Stuckey, M.Ed, CCC-SLP and Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP

Children and adults can suffer from voice disorders that affect the pitch, loudness, and overall quality of their vocal productions. A speech-language pathologist (SLP) can help these clients to vocalize easier and in a more productive manner. Read the information below to learn more about the components of voice as well as to get a practice activity for each voice component. *Remember—before beginning any voice treatment, the client should receive an evaluation by an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat Doctor).*



Components of Voice

Use the following, as adapted from *Voice Choice!*™ by Sandra Schwartz, M.S., CCC-SLP, to help your clients make easy vocal productions!



Airflow

Respiratory support and airflow through the glottis (the space between the vocal folds) is the “driving” power of the voice. Therefore, it is important to establish appropriate breath support and airflow as the baseline or starting point for vocal production. The concept of airflow is somewhat abstract and can be difficult to teach. Therefore, targeting “breathy sounds” (i.e., voiceless plosives) during speech will drill the concept of airflow through the glottis.

Practice Activity—Have the client exaggerate breathy onsets of the initial consonants of the words to get the air started. For example, *heat* and *face* would be *h-h-h-eat* and *f-f-f-ace*. Make sure he/she does not whisper. In the beginning, model the productions for the client.



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Voicing

Voicing refers to the vibration of the vocal folds. Refer to this as the “buzzing sound your vocal cords make.” The goal is to control voicing without pushing or “squeezing” the vocal folds too tightly during phonation and speech. To help demonstrate this concept, have the client place his/her hands on the larynx (voice box) while making a buzzing sound to feel the vibration. Contrasting voiced and voiceless continuant sounds such as /s/ vs. /z/ and /f/ vs. /v/ teaches the concept of “turning the voice on and off.”

Practice Activity—Begin by having the client produce isolated, sustained productions of the minimal pair sounds, /s/ and /z/ (“sssss” vs. “zzzzz”) and /f/ and /v/ (“fffff” vs. “vvvvv”). Emphasize turning the voice on and off. In the beginning, model the productions for the client.

Easy Onset

Easy onset refers to the contact of the vocal folds during the production of a word beginning with a vowel. The goal is to produce easy closure of the vocal folds into the airflow to produce the vowel sound vs. a hard closure (attack) of the vocal folds and pushing a burst of air through. This hard closure produces a staccato or attacked sound during the vowel production and is abusive to the vocal folds.

Practice Activity: Have the client practice saying /h/ and vowel onset minimal pairs (i.e., hear and ear). Focus on using an “easy” onset on the vowels. In the beginning, model the productions for the client.

Resonance

Resonance refers to the vibratory properties of the sound/voice above the glottis. This includes the oral and nasal cavities which shape the sound or give the voice its tonal quality. Although the vibration occurs at the laryngeal level (or glottis), vocal production should be focused at a higher level. Establishing a “higher” focus of the voice is helpful because it reduces tension at the level of the voice box and produces a resonant tone to the voice. The client should be able to “feel” the facial bones and nasal cavities vibrate by placing the fingers at the sides of the nose while humming.

Practice Activity: Have the client “hum” before saying the resonant words. For example, money would be *mmmmoney* (there is no break between humming and the word). In the beginning, model the productions for the client.



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