



Praxis für
Stimm- und Sprachtherapie

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Short information:
Voice disorders

VOICE DISORDERS

SYMPTOMS OF RESPIRATORY AND VOICE PROBLEMS:

Hoarseness, furred voice, poor workability, bad comprehensibility, loss of voice, difficulty in breathing, short breath, desire to clear one's throat, pain in the throat, sensation of a lump in one's throat are some of the signs that indicate a voice disorder.

The voice is an important means to make contact with our environment. The sudden or gradual loss of one's voice sets massive limitations to the daily private and professional life of an individual. The sound of the voice is a decisive communication component. Sound of voice, melody and clarity of speech have a huge impact on the success of a conversation.

Voice disorders can happen at any age.

Already **children** may develop voice problems due to vocal abuse, e.g. "vocal nodules due to extensive crying". Individuals **who use their voice professionally** such as teacher, trainer, head of departments, actors etc. often develop voice problems. But also with age and less opportunities to have a conversation, the voice may change. The sudden loss of one's voice, for instance due to paralysis or after surgery is often experienced as a threatening event for the fact that communication skills have been taken away from one day to another.

As soon as a voice disorders has been recognized, a specialist (ear-nose-throat physician, phoniatrist) should be consulted to identify the reason for the problem. Also auditory functions must be checked. The specialist will be able to identify the causes of the problem and further measures such as therapy may be prescribed.

CAUSES OF VOICE DISORDERS:

- Functional voice disorders** are disorders relating to the sound of the voice and vocal performance in general. Usually, no primary organic changes at the voice apparatus can be found.

Various causes lead to these disorders:

- biological preconditions (constitutional)
- habits (habitual)
- overburdening of the voice
- vocal abuse
- psychological influences
- Deformation:** asymmetrical changes in the appearance of the larynx
- Mutation disorders:** period when the voice is breaking
- Hormonal voice disorders**
- Voice disorders related to **paralysis** of laryngeal nerves
- Voice disorders after **surgery** (e.g. after thyroid gland has been operated)

THE AIM AND OBJECTIVE of voice therapy is to restore a workable and resilient voice. With the help of voice therapy a sonorous voice is to be developed whereas the usage of the voice feels natural and leaves the patient at ease with his/her voice in his/her daily private and professional life.

MAIN POINTS OF THERAPY

The focus of the therapy depends on the actual appearance of the disorder and the individual circumstances of the patient. The therapy concept of voice disorders in children is different from concepts of vocal chord paralysis or functional voice disorders. However, four main areas play a key role in this field:

TO SUPPORT AND FURTHER THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERCEPTIVE SKILLS:

Here the patient is to perceive him/herself in his/her psychological and physiological condition. Various areas of perception are treated, either in ensemble or one after another. Exercises concerning the perception of one's own body, emotions, tonus and posture are of highest importance here. The further development of auditory perceptive skills is essential for a change in the usage of one's voice.

TO SUPPORT AND FURTHER THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSIOLOGICAL CORRECT BREATHING

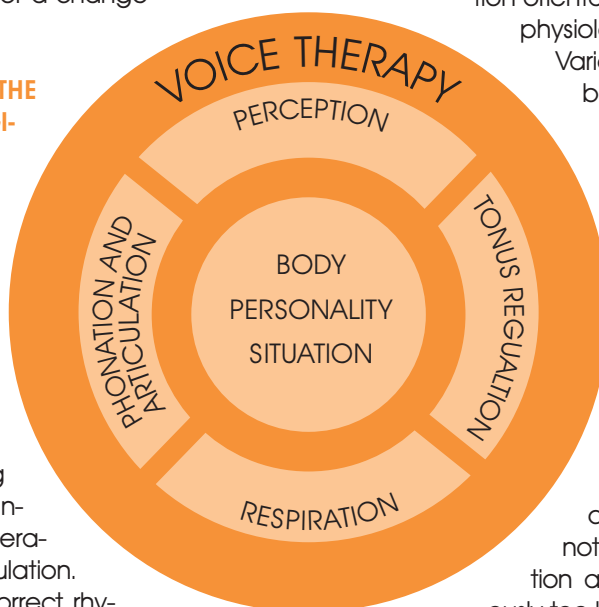
Working with the breath and breathing therapy are an essential part of voice therapy. Breathing is responsible for vital processes in the body. The automatic nervous system is closely linked with the breathing process. By breathing relaxation can be achieved. Conversely, short breathing is often connected with uneasiness. Abdominal respiration is imperative for the phonation and articulation. Actual speech is based on a correct rhythm between speaking and breathing.

TO SUPPORT AND FURTHER THE DEVELOPMENT OF TONUS REGULATION:

The change of posture and tension in the body play an important part in voice therapy. Chronic tenderness in the area of the neck and nape of the neck may have a negative influence on articulation and phonation. Tenderness can result from posture problems but also from stress or psychological problems. Tonus regulation orientates towards the psychological and physiological condition of the patient. Various techniques and exercises can be used here.

TO SUPPORT AND FURTHER THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSIOLOGICAL CORRECT USE OF THE VOICE

The appearance of voice disorders can be divided into two categories: a) Hyper-functional dysphonia = when tension is too high during phonation and articulation. Here it is of utmost importance not to overburden the voice. b) Hypo-functional dysphonia = when vocal chords are not completely closing during articulation and phonation. The tension is obviously too low. Also vocal chord paralysis leads to an incomplete closure of the vocal chords.



Economical speaking is the main objective of a voice therapy. This is to achieve sufficient expressive capacity with as little effort as possible.

Muscle groups involved in respiration, phonation, articulation and speaking should work with as little effort as possible. As regards respiration, phonation, articulation and speaking, this requires good co-ordination skills and appropriately developed tonus regulation. Physiological phonation and articulation (= correct speaking) is essential for the healthy use of one's voice. An improved workability of the voice can be achieved by developing the awareness of body spaces as resonance spaces.

The aim of the voice therapy is not to develop an artificial voice, which suppresses any emotional aspects. In contrary, the therapy intends to help the patient to perceive him/herself as a whole (body, soul, mind) and to express him/herself accordingly. This means to physically and vocally express annoyance and joy with as little effort as necessary and without tenderness.

Further information under www.stimmtherapie.de (also in English!)