



Identity-Affirming Voice & Communication Training

Support for Cisgender Speakers and Non-Gender Related Goals

From the Vocal Congruence Project - vocalcongruence.org/#identity-affirming

Voice can feel inseparable from our identity in countless ways. Based on voice alone, many listeners make assumptions about gender, race, age, body size, sexual orientation, personality, and much more. These assumptions can be conscious but they are most often unconscious. When listener assumptions made about one's voice fail to accurately align with the speaker's sense of self, the social results may be distressing to the speaker.

While it is common for a transgender or gender diverse person to seek the services of a voice provider in aligning their voice with their gender identity, this is not the only situation in which a provider offering affirming voice services can help. People of all identities and backgrounds can benefit from voice training targeting their individual goals. For this reason, some providers prefer the umbrella term "Identity Affirming" over "Gender Affirming."

Regardless of terminological choice, providers engaged in this work should be expected to respect and incorporate all intersectional identities and fully customize their services to your needs. While it is less common to see a provider's website or marketing mention broader identity affirming services, there is a high probability that they are willing and able to offer services supporting a wide range of goals, including the examples below.

Example: Gender-Affirming Care for Cisgender People

Numerous medical conditions can cause cisgender women to develop a deeper voice. For example, hyperandrogenism is commonly caused by Polycystic Ovary Syndrome and involves the circulation of excess androgens (such as testosterone) in the body. Some women will use voice training to try to behaviorally counteract changes to the voice caused by hormones.

Another cause for voice deepening in cisgender women is Reinke's Edema, which involves changes to the structure of the vocal folds (typically caused by smoking). When smoking cessation and/or surgery are not utilized or not effective at restoring a higher pitch, voice therapy with a speech-language pathologist may include pitch raising techniques.

Cisgender men may want to deepen their voices for a variety of medical reasons. One example is mutational falsetto, also known as puberphonia, a functional voice disorder characterized by the use of a high-pitched voice after puberty. Voice therapy with a speech-language pathologist can utilize a variety of pitch lowering and manual therapy techniques to establish a voice more congruent with age and gender.

- VCP's Referral Map: vocalcongruence.org/#map
- ASHA ProFind (SLP Database): asha.org/profind/
- Referrals from your local Voice Center (typically a practice where voice-specialized Ear, Nose, and Throat doctors and SLPs practice together)
- Referrals from community social media groups or pages

Cisgender men and women can also seek voice training for non-medical reasons, such as to feel affirmed in their masculinity or femininity. Any individual may benefit from the wide availability of gender affirming care, regardless of their gender identity.

Example: Addressing Age-Related Voice Changes

While the majority of voice changes happen over several years during puberty, many people also experience voice changes later in life. People assigned male at birth (AMAB) may notice higher pitch and other changes in voice quality due to age-related muscle atrophy, changes in breath support, and more. Some people assigned female at birth (AFAB) people develop a lower pitch due to hormonal shifts during menopause. Anyone might feel they sound older than they feel, and want their voice to reflect this.

Voice and communication providers can use a variety of technique to facilitate vocal congruence. As age-related voice change is often the result of a change to the structures used for voice production, a voice-specialized Speech-Language Pathologist is the best choice of provider. Learn more in our resource, [“What to Expect Working With a Speech-Language Pathologist.”](#) Therapy approaches are tailored to the specific cause of the voice change.

Example: Accent Modification

Accent modification is an elective service provided by some voice and communication providers that teaches the sounds, intonation patterns, word pronunciation, and other features of a language to an individual with an accent, a pattern of speech that is common among individuals from a certain region or who share a common first language. An individual may seek accent modification services to reduce the impact of linguistic discrimination, or to be better understood by others. As accent is connected to culture and heritage, some voice and communication providers morally object to the provision of accent modification services on the grounds that it denies identity and perpetuates a system of linguistic discrimination. Others view accent modification services as adding an additional layer to identity without denying the connection to culture. This may affirm identity as an immigrant or citizen. While a nuanced topic, for some individuals, accent modification can constitute identity affirming voice and communication training.

Finding a Provider

As previously mentioned, most providers are likely willing and able to offer services supporting a wide range of goals beyond gender-affirming services, even when not explicitly mentioned on their website or marketing. You can start your search in the following places:

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- ASHA ProFind (SLP Database): asha.org/profind/
- Referrals from your local Voice Center (typically a practice where voice-specialized Ear, Nose, and Throat doctors and SLPs practice together)
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