

10. Some Warm ups (and warm downs) for Singers in Special School.

There are lots of suggestions available for warm ups, so why have I picked on these suggestions for voice development in SEN? Mainly because they can be done by those learners who are able to move independently and can be adapted to enable other learners to participate. These learners may be able to observe and join in the actions at their own level, or they might accept someone sensitively helping them experience the activities. Another reason is that these warm ups are not dependent of knowing lots of words. You can show by demonstration. You might like to choose one or two activities from each section and only do those for a while.

It works best if everyone present, staff and students, joins in the warm up. It can be good to do some of the activities working in pairs. But this point is important. We are all very different, so we have to make sure that **no one does anything that is going to hurt themselves, or anyone else.**

It also helps if you can encourage your group to use their **imaginations**. An example would be to say 'make a face like a surprised lion cub' to encourage your singers to stretch their face muscles.

I suggest that warming up and getting ready to sing should usually follow this sequence.

Get your **BODY** ready to sing.

Get your **BREATH** ready to sing.

Get your **VOICE** ready to sing.

BODY

Stretch your arms and shoulders like a cat would in front of a fire.

Spread out your fingers and toes.

With your foot or hand, imagine it resting on wet sand. Press the shape into the sand. Do for both right and left.

For those standing, stand straight like a soldier, with knees locked back. Then stand like a puppet, held up by the strings but with knees 'soft' i.e. slightly forward. For those sitting, follow that movement with arms or hands. 'Soft knees' and joints are best for singing.

Imagine you are a beautiful frond of seaweed gently waving in the warm, sunny, tropical water. Wave your body from side to side.

Think 'heavy arms, heavy shoulders'.

Let your tummy be nice and round (not pulled flat).

Flick your right hand 4 times, then your left hand 4 times. Repeat but shaking only twice. Repeat but shaking only once.

Pat rhythmically on your own chest. Move your hands, whilst patting, down your body onto your thighs (or your arms), front and back. Cross your hands and pat on your shoulders. Then using one hand pat down your arm onto your hand, front and back. Do same with other hand.

Think of a puppet with a string from centre top of your head. This is gently pulled towards the ceiling. Keep looking straight ahead. You grow a little taller. Then let the string loosen a little.

Allow your head to flop downwards towards your chest. Swing your head slowly up to look at one shoulder, then back down, then to other shoulder. Do this 3 times. (Like looking at a friend in a swing boat, or on a BMX ramp.) Then look straight ahead, as if at a horizon.

Massage your own shoulders; place a hand under the opposite elbow & help it lift to your shoulder.

Put an imaginary pencil on your nose. Draw some shapes in front of you and at the sides. But do remember it's best not to go high.

Smile!

Place your hands on your cheeks and let the warmth go into your face. Use the 'heel' of your hand to stroke down your cheeks.

Pat gently (with finger tips) on your cheeks, then up on top of your head, front and back. Then stroke gently from the back of your head down your neck to your shoulders, then let your arms loose at your side.

Keep your lips together, but open your jaw. Can you feel your tongue poking your cheek?

Open mouth. Lick all round your lips with your tongue (you can imagine honey or ice cream here). Do it in both directions.

Make faces! That surprised lion cub, a mean witch, a nasty smell, a goal scorer, a crying baby, a really sad person, a really happy person

Pretend to be chewing some bread or bubblegum with a closed mouth. Then open your mouth and do it loudly and quickly.

BREATH (make sure no one gets lightheaded at this point – just choose one or two activities.)

Sitting or standing quietly, try to feel the small movements as you breathe.

From a normal breath in (i.e. not 'breathe in' type breath) let the air out of your mouth like a snake - /sssss/. Best not to go too empty.

When you breathe in, ask someone to look at your shoulders, or look in a mirror. See if you can breathe in without moving them. (To do this you'll need to keep your tummy 'nice and round'.)

Place your hand, or a piece of tissue, a few inches in front of your face. Feel the breath reach your hand. You can do the same onto another person's hand. Become aware of the flow of air when you breathe out.

Breathe onto a cold mirror and see it mist over. Or pretend to.

Pretend to pour yourself a glass of milk, put a straw in your mouth and then blow down it and see the constant stream of bubbles in your drink.

Use your breath to 'breathe into' the space in front of you and around you. You could breathe into the whole room. (Maybe imagine the breath is gold and glittering, or fire from a dragon.)

Imagine holding some ice cubes in your cupped hands. Breathe onto them to melt them. Imagine a beautiful ice sculpture on a table – breathe onto it and see it melting. Imagine a glacier in the distance – breathe to it.

Or imagine a wind turbine and make your breath keep it turning.

Pretend (or really do it) that someone has blown bubbles nearby – you blow them away.

Pretend you are a thirsty dog, panting.

Put one finger in front of your face and imagine it is a candle. Light it with a match and 'see' the flame. Make the flame flicker with your breath. Then blow it out. Then light 2,3 4 or 5 candles on your fingers See if you can blow out all the candles on a birthday cake in one breath.

Pretend there is some hot potato in your mouth – breathe and stretch the back of your mouth to cool it.

Set up a steady beat. Try breathing in for 2 beats, then out for 4 beats (then out for 5 or 6 beats). Always keep the 'in' breath on 2 beats. Take some 'normal' breaths in between, in case you all get lightheaded.

VOICE

With a stretch and maybe a gentle yawn, let out a sigh.

Yawn down a long slope. Try shaking your shoulders when the sound gets near the bottom.

Sound like a big bumble bee and buzz slowly around some flowers. Then sound like a fly or a mosquito buzzing quickly up and down.

Imagine exotic fish in an aquarium, or coloured streamers, or birds flying. Using various vowel sounds, let your voice 'describe' the movements.

Make motorbike or racing car sounds. It is easier to keep the lips vibrating if you push your cheeks up slightly with your fingers.

Try flicking your lips with a finger whilst making sounds.

Pretend to be a siren on a police car or ambulance using a 'nee-naw, nee-naw' sound.

Pretend to see someone you know and call 'Oo –oo' on two notes.

Try chewing the bread or gum again, but this time make 'mmm' noises as you do it. Then make really excited noises, with the voice going up and down, as you chew.

Put your hands on your tummy and do a Father Christmassy 'Ho ho ho ho' a few times.

Make different sounds to express various exaggerated emotions e.g. Wow, hey, yeh, nah, yuk.

Echo nonsense words or other sounds made by the leader. It's good to set up a rhythm to do this.

Choose a word ending in 'ng' e.g. bong or ping. Bounce the last 'ng' sound several times.

Ask if anyone has a birthday that day or around that time. Ask the group to hum 'Happy birthday to you' to that person. Then maybe sing it to them.

It is often fun to do some rhymes or simple tongue twisters at the end of a warm up. This gets the 'articulators' tongue, lips, teeth, jaw, throat really ready to sing.

You can end with a short 'warm up' song that gets everyone moving and singing together.

Warming down.

When we have been working our voices hard for quite a while (talking or singing), we tend to raise the pitch and have a bit more tension around our shoulders, neck and jaw. It helps to get our voices back to normal to do some gentle hums that glide downwards while gently massaging the face, and also remembering to let our shoulders hang loose.