

Voice and Communication Therapy for trans and non-binary people – What is it?

Information for patients

This leaflet contains:


- Information about what Voice and Communication Therapy (VCT) is, and what it involves.
- Information to help you decide if and when you would like to engage with Voice and Communication Therapy.

What is Voice and Communication Therapy (VCT)?

- VCT teaches you how to work towards your personal goals related to voice and speech. Progress is made by learning voice skills in exercises and then practising using different voice characteristics when talking.
- Some example goals for VCT include:
 - To feel more comfortable with my voice and have less vocal dysphoria
 - To feel confident to speak up whenever I want to
 - To reduce instances of people misgendering me on the telephone
 - For speaking to feel comfortable and not tiring
 - To be able to use the voice I want, even when I am speaking loudly.
- VCT usually involves:
 - Attending sessions (either in-person or via video consultation) with a Speech & Language Therapist to learn about voice, to discuss your personal goals, and learn exercises to explore or change vocal characteristics to make progress towards your personal goals.
 - Reviewing and optimising your daily vocal health practices and introducing a daily vocal warm up and/or practice into your routine.
 - Completing self-directed practice between sessions. This begins with practising 'exercises' but over time, more and more practice will be completed in real communication. Note: 95% of the hard work happens outside of your appointments.

VCT recommendations usually involve:

- Following healthy voice care advice
- Completing voice exercises every day for a few months
- Practising using new voice characteristics in real communication.



"VCT has been far more accessible and self-driven, and less 'medical' than I had previously assumed."
- Mia

What is it NOT:

- VCT does not involve anyone telling you what you “should” sound like.
- VCT does not require any medical examinations. In fact, sessions might feel somewhere in-between a typical medical appointment and a singing lesson.

Am I ready for VCT?

Things to think about include:

- **Do I have the time for VCT just now?**
 - VCT involves attending monthly appointments; starting new habits; and completing regular voice practice. We usually recommend dedicating at least 5-10 minutes to voice practice every day. We also ask people to commit to attending their VCT sessions and not cancel appointments unless they are unwell.
 - If you are in a period of being unusually busy, stressed or unwell it is sensible to wait until things are back to what is normal for you.
- **Am I ready for VCT just now?**
 - VCT is an active process. It requires participation in practical activities including making sounds that can feel unusual. VCT brings your attention to your voice and sometimes this can make people feel self-conscious or more aware of voice dysphoria.
 - People tend to make more progress if they can start using their new voice skills in real conversation straight away. If you do not feel ready for anyone to hear your new voice, it is sensible to wait until you feel more ready before starting VCT sessions. Some people choose to make more progress with their transition, or complete other aspects of healthcare (e.g. counselling or psychology input), before starting VCT.

What to expect at your first appointment

- You can ask your Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) any questions.
- You will be asked how you feel about your voice and whether there are any aspects of voice you might like to explore or change.
- The SLT will explain how the voice works and how we change the various characteristics of voice that affect how we sound.
- You can decide, together with your SLT, whether to start a course of VCT.
- If you would like to start VCT, we will discuss your personal goals and make a plan for how to work towards these.
- We may begin practical exercises which involve using your voice to make different sounds.
- Appointments last up to 60 minutes.
- You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to.
- You can let your SLT know about any access needs you have and anything that will make VCT easier for you.

Will I need to prepare?

- If possible, bring a drink of water with you to your appointment.
- Wear comfortable clothes. We may do some gentle stretches.
- If you are attending via video consultation, ensure you have a private room to attend from, where you feel happy to use your voice to make sounds.

Questions and Answers:

Will Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) affect my voice?

Estrogen:

Taking Estrogen *will not* directly affect your voice. If you want to change your voice in a way that could be described as higher, brighter, lighter, more feminine, or less masculine there is no direct benefit to waiting in relation to starting estrogen. You can request a referral to VCT as soon as you feel ready to start. Though people can find they have more motivation for voice change after other aspects of transition have progressed.

Testosterone:

Taking Testosterone *will* directly affect your voice. It will thicken your vocal cords and allow you to speak with a lower pitch. Most of this change will occur within 12 months of starting testosterone. If you have a specific concern about your voice, or you are unhappy with your voice change after 12 months; you can request a referral to VCT. For more information see the leaflet '**Testosterone and Voice**':

<https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Testosterone-and-voice.pdf>



Does everyone need VCT?

No. Voice is personal. If your voice is healthy, do not feel that you 'should' attend VCT if:

- you are happy with your voice
- you don't care about the sound of your voice
- you don't think the results of VCT would be worth the effort involved.

However, if you experience any physical discomfort when speaking we *do* recommend attending voice therapy to learn to speak in a safe, comfortable way.

Note: If you experience pain when speaking or have hoarse voice or other unintended voice change for longer than six weeks, you should talk to your GP about being referred to the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) department.

Is VCT very difficult?

People often find that achieving voice change within exercises and practice conversations is easier than they thought it would be.

However, depending on your goals, it can take lots of time and practice to be able to use new voice characteristics all day long and across different areas of life (e.g. home, work, socialising, telephone, noisy places).

What can I do to help with voice change before I am ready for VCT, or whilst I am waiting for my first appointment?

- 1) Firstly, if you smoke or vape, take whatever steps you can to quit or reduce this as much as is possible. If you are smoking, you can ask your clinician to refer you to a smoking cessation service or you can get in touch directly online:
<https://services.nhsllothian.scot/quit-your-way/>
- 2) Secondly, make sure you are well hydrated. Having sips of non-caffeinated fluids throughout each day is advised. If your throat still feels dry or sticky, inhaling steam can add additional moisture to your vocal tract (allow boiling water to cool a little before inhaling to avoid burns).
- 3) There is more information about voice care advice and initial exercises in the leaflet '**Voice and Communication Therapy for Trans and Non-binary People – Where to Start**':
<https://policyonline.nhsllothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Voice-and-Communication-Therapy-for-Trans-and-Non-binary-People-Where-to-start.pdf>

