

# Do People Say You Talk Too Softly?

## Objective

To help you understand the possible causes of talking too softly for people to hear you, and to learn strategies for talking in a voice that people can hear.

## You Should Know

All of us have different speaking voices and different tones—high-pitched, low-pitched, loud, soft, clear, mumbled. Embracing our vocal differences is a good thing, except if it gets in the way of your family, social, or professional life.

Are people telling you that you talk too softly? Are your colleagues and friends constantly leaning in and asking you to repeat what you just said? If you are aware that you are a soft talker, that is not necessarily a bad thing. But when many people simply can't hear you adequately, then maybe it's worth looking at how to change. Sometimes soft talkers feel defensive. They might push back at their critics and say, "Hey, there's nothing wrong with my voice. Maybe you need to listen better." Sometimes soft talkers are very shy and would rather fade into the woodworks than have to speak louder in order to be heard.

This worksheet explores the reasons behind soft talking and some strategies you might use to be heard.

## What to Do

Here are some reasons that people might speak softly. Put a checkmark next to the ones that fit you and your experience:

A physical problem such as weakness in your vocal cords or difficulty with breath control.

Naturally soft voice ever since you can remember.

Lack of attention to your speech patterns and quality of speech—mumbling, talking too fast, not paying attention to your vocal production.

A speech problem such as a lisp or stutter that has caused you to feel embarrassed.

Tremulous or shaky voice when you have to project or be heard.

Being generally shy and introverted.

Fear of being heard and seen by other people in social situations; fear they will judge you or laugh at you.

Depression, sadness, or general low energy; not enough "oomph" to speak louder.

\_\_\_ Poor self-esteem/shame about your voice itself, perhaps from criticism by parents or teachers when you were younger.

\_\_\_ Talking softly to deliberately have people ignore you or not engage in conversation.

\_\_\_ Growing up in a family of soft talkers.

\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, write your thoughts in answer to this question: What are the negative consequences of your soft talking? For instance, do people end up backing away or ignoring you? Do people act annoyed with you? Are you passed over for a promotion because you fade into the background? Something else?

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What are the positive gains of your soft talking? For instance, not participating in social or professional activities (if you're socially anxious), not having to engage in small talk, not having to feel embarrassed or called out for your soft talking.

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Here are some ways that you can learn to be heard better in family, social, or professional situations:

- First, rule out any physical cause by getting a complete physical and possibly seeing a speech therapist or ENT (ear, nose, throat) doctor.
- Take an acting or improv class, where you can gain practice with public speaking.
- Join Toastmasters or another public-speaking group to improve your vocal habits.
- Take a speech or public-speaking class through your school or local university or adult-education center.
- Learn to sing, which can help you improve breath control and awareness of pitch, tone, and volume.
- Record yourself on your phone or another device to see what you sound like. Ask for feedback from safe people in your life.
- Read aloud to yourself or someone else, both to exercise your voice and to be more relaxed about hearing your voice out loud.
- Move closer to people so they can hear you better.
- If you're standing far apart, learn to raise your voice until they can hear you. Ask, "Can you hear me OK?"
- Practice breathing exercises that teach you to breathe using your diaphragm, a muscle in the belly, which singers learn to use in order to better manage their breath and vocal production.

### **Reflection on This Exercise**

1. Of the items on the first checklist above, which is the one that strikes closest to home for you? Why?

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2. Of the bulleted items in the list above, which one or two options are you willing to try?

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3. Whom can you turn to for support and encouragement in working on this problem?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

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