

Chapter 12

Voice

Such an important topic: to be able to use your voice. The term “voice” conveys more than sound. Voice refers to how you think, share your ideas, and state your perceptions.

Research

To learn how to use our voice, we need to speak and have a listener. The speaker can use any language that works for them, spoken, written, or signed. The listener can be another person, a pet or a page in a journal, and sometimes just making time to listen to ourselves is a good option. Best to start developing your voice early, like when you first arrive on the planet. When Joey was born I’d hold him in the crook of my arm and ask this little seven pounder about his day. He’d respond with feet kicking and arms flailing. He had a whole story to tell me and eight years later when I sit next to him and ask how he’s doing, his story is still unfolding. In order to learn that we have a story to tell, we need someone who will ask an inviting question and respectfully listen to the response. The interchange takes practice.

An aspect of educating nurses is

to teach students how to listen attentively, how to hear what is being said, and how to ask for clarification so we really understand what the person means. We know it is so rewarding when someone gets who we really are. Some of us do start using our voice early, as I described little infant Joey’s conversation. For me I had to teach myself to tell a story. I grew up in a generation and culture where it was believed girls should be seen and not heard. Being the good daughter, I followed those rules. They worked fine until I got to college and my new dorm friends interpreted my silence as superiority rather than shyness. I watched others, practiced, and took tentative steps to join in the conversation—from talking to my friends to volunteering in class to speaking in a mic in front of over 500 coaches. I’m still practicing. It’s been worth it.

Relax

The three-part breath.

1. Feel the air coming into your nose when you inhale and out of your nose when you exhale.
2. Put your hand on your chest. Feel your lungs fill up on an inhale and deflate on an exhale.
3. Put your hand on your belly. Feel your belly expand on an inhale and sink back in on an exhale

Write

How do you use your voice to express your ideas, opinions, thoughts, or feelings? Write about a time you felt good about a contribution of yours. Was it in a gathering of friends, family, or your team? Was the setting informal or was it more formal like in a discussion during a class? Where do you feel most comfortable sharing your ideas? Write a five-minute story about a time when you felt heard. It could be recent or a while ago. Who was there? What was the topic? What was the response to your voice? What was that like for you?

Reflect

Look for a time this week to share your opinion or feelings about an issue. It could be on anything like, where to eat, what to wear or a political view. Note your opinion. Note how others respond. Note if you tend to share in certain places with certain people and not with others. Why is that? Would it be good to share more of what you think? How will you do that next time?