

Talking Matters

www.talkingmatters.com.au Ph: 8255 7137
 Helping your child to reach their potential



Goal: Teaching children to copy sounds and words

One of the many problems faced when working with children who are late talkers is how to get them copying verbal models, first sounds and then words. Getting your child to copy something you say is one of the first goals for a child who isn't talking.

A recent article (reference below) outlined "evidence based strategies to facilitate early speech development in young children who are not readily imitating sounds" (p.133). The research they looked at produced six major strategies that had some proof in the research of success in helping children to copy sounds.

The six strategies identified apply to young children who are not readily copying early speech sounds.

Evidence-Based Strategies for Eliciting Speech-Like Vocalizations

1. **"Provide access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)"** AAC is the use of either signs or pictures to help children to have their message understood. Talking Matters has a separate handout with more information about this called "PECS". When looking at the research, there was evidence to support the use of AAC as it helps speech development, and can build the child's understanding of the names of items and how to put words together in sentences.
2. **"Minimize pressure to speak"** (DeThorne *et al.*, 2009, p.136). High-pressure situations often make it difficult for children to concentrate on their speech. By following your child's lead and reducing requests for them to copy they are likely to be more successful.
3. **"Imitate the child"** (DeThorne *et al.*, 2009, p.137) – the authors proposed that copying the child provides the child with a model of what to do, thereby helping the child learn to imitate by being imitated. The evidence also suggests that young children are more likely to produce (and imitate) new words with sound patterns that are already within the child's existing set of sounds than they are to try to imitate more challenging sounds. Strategies include copying the child's actions,



Teaching children to copy sounds and words

Based on an article written by Cindy Earle, Speech pathologist for Hanen, from information gathered from The American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology titled, "When 'Simon Says' Doesn't Work: Alternatives to Imitation for Facilitating Early Speech Development" (DeThorne, Johnson, Walder & Mahurin-Smith, 2009)
 Last Modified October 2010



sounds and words, interpreting the child's messages and treating every sound as a word to encourage children to imitate verbal and non-verbal actions.

4. **"Utilize exaggerated intonation and slowed tempo"** (DeThorne *et al.*, 2009, p.138) – the authors state that exaggerated intonation and the accompanying slower tempo may help children learn language. They suggest that this may be, in part, because the sing-song nature of this type of speech may draw upon overlapping networks in the brain that are used for singing and speech production.
5. **"Augment auditory, visual, tactile and proprioceptive feedback"** (DeThorne *et al.*, 2009, p.139) – the authors suggest that, by increasing sensory feedback, a child's ability to learn a new word is increased. Enhancing sensory feedback includes speaking more loudly (emphasizing target words), using gestures (or body language) and ensuring parents and children are face to face during interactions. When children are face to face with their parents the child both sees and hears how to say the sound or word more clearly.
6. **"Avoid emphasis on nonspeech-like articulator movements: focus on function"** (DeThorne *et al.*, 2009, p.140) – This means that it is much better to use real words that have some meaning for children than to practice something that has no meaning for them. Doing Mr Tongue or other such lip and tongue 'exercises' are it seems a waste of time for the vast majority of children. Children need to practice the actual skill they are needing to develop rather than doing pointless tongue wagging.



Teaching children to copy sounds and words

Based on an article written by Cindy Earle, Speech pathologist for Hanen, from information gathered from The American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology titled, "When 'Simon Says' Doesn't Work: Alternatives to Imitation for Facilitating Early Speech Development" (DeThorne, Johnson, Walder & Mahurin-Smith, 2009)

Last Modified October 2010