

Talking Matters

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 Helping your child to reach their potential



Top 10 things to do to help your child's speech

If you are waiting for an assessment or therapy to begin, or if you just want to help your child's development every day, here are some simple things you can do that make a real difference to your child's speech skills.

1. **Talk together every day.** The more speech your child hears the better their speech will be. Speak clearly and use the correct words for things. Don't repeat your child's errors. They may be cute but your child needs to hear the correct way of saying things to learn. Try to find some uninterrupted talking time when the TV and other noises and distractions are turned off and you just talk together.
2. **Look after your child's hearing.** Have a hearing test with a qualified audiologist if you are concerned about hearing or speech and always follow up on any ear infections. If your child has more than four ear infections in a year ask to see an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist.
3. **Get face to face with your child.** Ensure your child can see your face when you are talking to them. When you model tricky words or sounds make sure they can see as well as hear you. This helps them focus, lets them see and hear your words better and encourages them to copy you. This might mean getting down on the floor, putting your child in your lap, cuddling up together on a couch or bed or sitting them up in a high chair at the table with you.
4. **Play games with sounds.** During play, encourage sound play using speech sounds. Use real speech sounds rather than throaty, non-speech sounds. Try car games: car - putt, putt, down a ramp - weeeeeeeee, putting on brakes - eeeeeeeek, flat tyre - th, th, th, horn honking - beep, beep; farm animals: baa, moo, nay, woof; draw dots, lines and scribbles and make sounds as you go. Copy sounds that you hear around the house: doorbell - ding, microwave - beep etc.
5. **Be realistic.** Be aware of the ages children typically develop sounds and what sounds to expect from your child.

Typical ages for sounds to develop are

3 years - m, n, h, p, w, d, g, y, k, f, b, t

4 years - sh, ch, j, l, s

5 years - r, v

6 years - z

8 years - th



Also remember that children learn new sounds in stages, first in single sounds, then in words, then sentences and then in conversation last of all. Don't expect your child to remember to use a new sound all the time straight away.

6. **Listen to what your child says not just how they say it.** The main reason we speak is to communicate an idea. Make sure you listen to what your child is saying and respond to that. A child who feels listened to and heard will communicate more. Once your child feels listened to and understood try the following techniques to help fix any errors.
7. **Be positive.** Use lots of encouragement and tell your child what they have done well. Use specific words. “I like the way you used your words to ask for that”. “I like the way you tried that new tricky word”. “You tried to fix that /s/ sound, well done” “When you looked at me and spoke clearly I could understand just what you wanted”. Encourage things such as eye contact, correct speed and volume of talking as these help speech be more easily understood.
8. **Recast your child’s errors.** If your child makes a mistake when talking, repeat what they say, fixing the mistake to show them the right way. Use a positive tone and repeat it a few times but keep it natural. E.g. Child “I see a shish”. Adult “Yes a **fish**, I see the **fish** too, a pretty **fish**”. Try repeating this same word a few more times later on, so your child gets lots of chances to hear it the right way. Notice the sound your child finds difficult and repeat other words with that sound too, again being positive and natural. “look he’s in the **fish** tank, eating **fish food**, see his **fins**, now he’s swimming **fast**, how **funny**”
9. **Model new words with tricky sounds.** Look at books and play games that allow you to teach your child new words with sounds your child finds tricky. Alphabet books, games and puzzles are good. Look for books with a whole page of pictures that start with a certain sound, say them for your child and ask them to watch you as you say them. Look for stories with repeated lines that include a tricky sound such as “Where is the green sheep?” by Mem Fox for /sh/ or “red fish, blue fish” by Dr Suess for /f/. As your child is getting better at saying a new sound you could also try jokes and rhymes with that sound for extra practice.
10. **Practice tricky words.** If there are important words your child has difficulty with, such as names of family members or other important people, or things that they like to talk about often, give these some extra practice. Make a list of three to five only and put them on the fridge. Add a picture for each if your child can’t read. Say each word clearly for your child and ask them to try and copy you. Try each word a couple of times per day and praise your child for trying and for getting clearer.

