

ARTICULATION DIFFICULTIES

From Catherine Redmayne
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If you are waiting for an appointment with a Speech and Language Therapist because you have concerns about the clarity of your child's speech, you may find the following notes helpful. It is also a good idea to have your child's hearing checked as intermittent hearing difficulties can be a feature of some children's development.

1. It is important to remember that no child starts with all the speech sounds in use! Small children have fewer consonants in use and often reduce clusters like sp to one sound. They may omit word-final consonants. Difficult sounds may be simplified (e.g. d for z, t for ch, t for k). This is normal.
2. Some children continue with this simplification beyond the usual age. Or they adopt strange schemes of made-up sounds, or use one sound (such as d) for every consonant.
3. They may not be aware they are using different sounds and will say indignantly *I said that* if you correct them.
4. Do not expect miracles when teaching new sounds. They may copy a sound but not use it. It is very hard to use all the planning, processing and action needed to talk quickly and accurately.
5. Work up slowly through a hierarchy of tasks:
 - a. Hear the sound - pick it out from other similar sounds with rhyming words (pea/tea door/four Sue/shoe etc.)
 - b. Learn to make the new sound
 - c. Join it to a vowel (like *ar* or *ee oo*) and make nonsense syllables
 - d. Practise simple real words with the sound
 - e. Use these words to answer questions, or in a game
 - YOU say most of a sentence and the child completes it with one of the target words (e.g. the word might be *shark* and you say *the big fish got eaten by a ...*). Give counters for good pronunciation - work up to being strict and taking the counter yourself if the word was not right.
 - Make some photocopies of your practice-words/pictures and play pairs. Remember to say the words revealed at each turn or there's no practice going on.
 - f. Make a sentence using the words (said properly)
 - Pile up your cards and take a card. Make a sentence. Give some examples of what makes a good sentence (it can be a statement or a question).
 - Work up to putting two words in the same sentence - both must be correctly pronounced to count.
 - g. Remember to say a few target words (you have agreed with the child) that have the sound during the day
 - h. VERY GRADUALLY work up to the stage where the child self-corrects
6. It is unwise to over-correct too early as the child becomes very discouraged and may say *I can't talk* - and refuse to do so. At first, restrict correction to practice times. You may say the word again if it occurs, but don't demand that the child copies all the time.

SOUND CLUSTERS

English has many clusters of consonants which can appear at the beginning (e.g. skip) or the end (e.g. ask). The commonest word-initial groups are:

- s-blends
- l-blends
- r-blends

Before trying to teach the clusters, it is important to listen out and check your child has both the sounds in use! You can't say sk if you haven't got an s and a k!

Some children tackle the s-blends well, others succeed first with the l-blends. It is not worth tackling the r-blends until age 5 or 6. If the child's r-sound is very like a w-sound, it may be better to wait for these until the r-sound is more mature.

It is normally best to establish the clusters at the beginning of words first.

The child must realise you have added a second sound, not made a new sound. Many children use a sort of combination sound (so pr comes out like a funny f). Or they omit one sound from the cluster.

When you play games, use plastic letters or letters written on individual bits of card. Or devise some other way to draw attention to the fact it is one sound after another sound. (If your letter set has no digraph tiles – ch sh th – it is worth making them.) The Jolly Phonics magnetic letter set available from Early Learning Centre has many digraphs available. You can also send for the free leaflet with advice for parents, which is excellent.

A method which often works with children who do have both the necessary sounds available can be to think of rhymes e.g. top/stop pot/spot key/ski nap/snap mile/smile. Say the one without the s and then practise with a plastic snake who says ssssss (not suh) and finds the other word! Using symbol software makes it easy to find the pictures. It is sometimes better to leave the writing off as English spelling is so odd!

You can apply this method to build all the common sound clusters at the beginning of words.

Again, don't expect immediate use of the new sounds in conversation – practise regularly with some flash cards and simple games for a while.

Remember there are many resources and stories available free and low-cost on the Widgit website:

Resources to download www.widgit.com/resources

Tell us what you think of these resources, suggest things that you would find useful, or even better, share you own ideas and examples with other parents.

Contact resources@widgit.com