

# How Parents Can Help Facilitate Articulation Skills

by Harriett Hoeprich, Speech/Language Specialist

## **Be a practice partner.**

Ask your child's speech/language therapist to let you know when it would be helpful for you to practice at home. Then practice your child's successful words, using word cards or objects, at home. Use games and other fun activities, and make your sessions short and frequent. (5-15 minutes a day)

## **Don't directly correct sounds that your child has not worked on yet.**

Direct correction has been shown to be largely ineffective and disruptive. This is especially true when the child has not had the opportunity to have the new skill presented in a more isolated way than connected speech. At some point, your therapist will let you know if your child is at the stage where gentle reminders may be effective during connected speech for the targeted sound. This is usually after mastery has been achieved at the single word level, however.

## **Use revision every day to address the articulation needs as a whole.**

Parents don't realize how powerful this can be, particularly if the revision is used consistently and simply. Revision is the technique where you repeat what the child has said, but use the correct pronunciation. You may want to give the sound a little extra emphasis. (Example--Child: Look at bu! Adult: Look at that bug! Go, bug, go!)

## **Don't directly imitate your child's errors. Model good speech.**

Some of the cute things our children say are very precious to us. But don't inadvertently reinforce the incorrect productions by laughing or drawing attention. Certainly don't imitate the incorrect production. Repeat the utterance using the correct pronunciation. And make a tape or video recording to save your memories of some of the adorable things your child says at this age! Model good speech.

## **Address health issues that may contribute to the problem.**

Fight ear infections. Address other physical difficulties that may contribute, such as mouth breathing or voice difficulties.

**Read to your child.**

It's amazing how much this accomplishes. Use reading as a way to surround your child with the targeted sound. (See "Ideas for Books to Enhance Articulation Skills".)

**Play with your child.**

Spend time talking with your child in play, while you model the correct productions very simply, using revision.

**Talk to your child.**

Talk to your child as you go through your daily routine. This is a chance to model many correct productions, use revision, and stimulate language development, too.

Below are some fun ideas of games and activities you can use to practice your child's sounds. Many of these games involve the use of simple picture cards which can be made out of index cards and catalogs.

Use the picture cards to play Concentration (Memory) or Go Fish.

Play a board game like Candyland, but have your child say a word before he takes a turn each time. Don't forget to take a word yourself! Then it's one more model your child gets to hear. When your child is ready for this step, let your child "catch" you making the sound "the old way" and let him show you how it should be said with the "new sound".

If your child isn't quite ready to enjoy traditional board games like Candyland, use something like Hi-Ho Cherrio, which is a simpler type of game. Use the picture cards in the same manner, however.

Play more active types of games, such as Nerf Golf, Bean Bag Toss, Ring Toss, and Bowling by simplifying the game to include less movement. This works really well with the minimal pairs. Put out two bowling pins with a picture card of the pair against each one (pin-bin, for example). Then try several approaches: Have your child tell you which one he knocked over, or which one he will knock over. Then gently tell him: "You said you were going to knock over the picture of 'pin'. You knocked over 'bin'."

Hide the picture cards and let your child "find" them. You can also hide the pictures in other containers, such as plastic eggs.



# Help Your Child Learn to Speak Clearly

by Elizabeth M. Prather, Ph.D.

Parents play a key role in the development of their child's speech and language skills. Many parents want to help their child but are not sure exactly what to do. One of the most common questions parents ask speech and language professionals is:

**How can I help my child to learn to speak clearly?**

## 1. Expect errors.

All children, and adults too, make some errors in *articulation*—how they make speech sounds. In fact, children normally take seven to eight years to learn to say all of our English sounds correctly!

## 2. Honesty pays.

Be honest when you do not understand what your child says. Admit that you do not understand. Ask the child to tell you again. Or say, "Show me what you are talking about."

Don't pretend that you understand by saying, "That's nice" or "Yes, that's right." You won't be fooling anyone! Your child will probably think that you are just not interested. Your child may stop talking to you, become angry, or cry.

When you understand part of your child's remark, let the child know. For example, "You are talking about the dog. What did she do?"

## 3. Be a good listener

Listen to what your child is trying to tell you, not how it is said. Ignore your child's errors. Correcting errors, instead of responding to the message, can undermine your child's confidence as a speaker.

To improve, your child must keep talking! If you constantly correct pronunciation errors, your child may begin to speak less and less. As a general rule, never force your child to repeat a remark you have understood. You want talking to be a good experience.

## 4. Ignore mistakes.

When people laugh at pronunciation errors, your child feels angry and frustrated. Teasing hurts a child's feelings and never improves speech. Ask

family members to be kind and ignore your child's mistakes. Don't imitate the child's "baby talk." Use correct speech that your child can imitate.

## 5. Model good speech.

When your child makes errors, repeat the child's message correctly. But don't ask the child to repeat after you. Children learn by listening. They need to listen to good speech. For example, your child might say, "I tan't fit dis wid" for "I can't fix this lid." You could repeat and *model* as follows: "You can't fix this lid? Maybe I can fix it." You are providing a model of correct speech for your child to hear and imitate. Speak clearly and slowly.

Your examples or models of correct speech help your child in two ways. First, your child knows that you understood. Your child feels successful because you "got the message." Second, your correct speech helps your child learn to speak more clearly. You have not criticized your child or called attention to errors. Yet you have given the child a chance to hear correct speech.

In time, your child will probably begin to correct errors by repeating back your models. Self-correction will be spontaneous, not forced by your demands to "say it" again and again.

## 6. Fight ear infections.

Good hearing is necessary for the development of normal articulation. Ear infections can cause hearing losses. Children learn language by hearing it. If your child has even mild or temporary hearing losses during the preschool years, speech and language development may be delayed.

Tugging on the ears, congestion, runny nose, or turning up the TV volume are signs of a possible ear infection. Children do not always tell you when they have ear problems. Sometimes they don't even run a fever. When you suspect that your child has an ear infection or that the child's ears are "plugged," see your family physician.

Even mild hearing losses may prevent children from hearing the difference between certain *consonant* sounds. This makes many different words sound the same. For example, a child with



hearing problems may hear "beat," "be," "bean," "beef," "bead," "beep," "beast," and "beak" as the same word!

It is very important to talk clearly and use simple, short sentences when you suspect your child is having hearing problems. Get your child's attention before you speak. Minimize distractions and background noise including radio and television.

#### 7. Be a "good speech" partner

Many parents worry about their child learning incorrect speech by listening to a friend or family member with a speech problem. But when most of the child's speaking partners use normal speech, the child usually develops normal speech, too.

You do need to be concerned and take action when your child hears many poor speakers. Try to increase the amount of time your child hears "good speech." Perhaps you can spend more time with your child. Or, you may just do more talking when you are together. You may not be able to keep your child from hearing poor speakers. But you can increase your child's time spent with good speakers.

## Vocabulary

*Articulation*—The production of speech sounds.

*Consonants*—The sounds made by stopping or restricting the outgoing breath.

*Model*—To provide an example of good speech or other behavior; to demonstrate a desired response

#### For more information:

Pushaw, David R. 1976. *Teach your child to talk*. New York, NY: Dantree Press.

#### Refer to:

2.2 Speech Development

6.2.1 Reasons for Delayed Speech Development

6.2.3 Learning Speech Sounds Through Listening

6.2.4 Help Your Child Learn Speech Sounds at Home

10.2.4 Otitis Media and Speech and Language Development

# ORAL MOTOR EXERCISE PROGRAM

## Continuous Oral Motor Movements

SETS: lips exercises

Set 1: Open mouth wide as if saying “ah”, close lips tight as if saying “mm”

Set 2: Press lips together as if saying “mm”, pucker lips as if saying “oo”

Set 3: Pucker lips as if saying “oo”, smile as if saying “ee”

Set 4: Bite lower lip, rest and repeat

SETS: tongue exercises

Set 1: Protrude tongue, pull back in

Set 2: Protrude tongue out, move to left corner then right corner, relax and repeat

Set 3: Touch each corner of the lips with the tongue tip, go around in a circular fashion

Set 4: Place tip of tongue in one cheek then the other

Set 5: Protrude tongue out and up, out and down

Set 6: Open mouth wide, slowly raise tongue to alveolar ridge (right behind the top front teeth) keeping mouth open, relax and repeat

Select no more than 5 exercises at a time and complete 5 repetitions of each.  
For more oral motor practice, download this FREE app:

Lingraphica – small talk

HAVE FUN!!

# Articulation therapy activities for older students

There are a lot of articulation activities out there, but sometimes it's hard to find articulation therapy activities older students will enjoy and benefit from.

Here is a home maintenance program to use with more advanced students. These are the students who are able to produce their target sounds accurately in the therapy room, but need to work on self-monitoring outside the therapy setting. In other words, they now have the ability to articulate their target sounds accurately in the articulation therapy setting, but they need a bit more practice to make their accurate speech sound articulation more habitual.

Before doing this or any home articulation activities, check with your child's speech-language pathologist to be sure it is appropriate for her. **Children who are not yet ready for this activity will not benefit from it.**

- Have your child read to you for 5-10 minutes each day (just before bed is a great time for this!). Pick a book that is within your child's comfort zone so that she will not have to put a lot of mental energy into decoding the text.
- Before your child begins reading, offer a reminder to self-monitor her target speech sound articulation. For example, if your child is working on the /s/ sound, you might say: "Remember, we're going to be looking out for words with the /s/ sound. When you come to a word with the S sound, really try to make the best /s/ sound you can."
- Encourage your child to read slowly. It is all right for her to slow down or exaggerate words with the target sound. You may also have her point to words with the target sound as she reads them—or, you can give her an auditory cue (e.g., snapping your fingers or tapping the table with a pencil).
- Remember, you're her fan, not her critic. If she distorts the target sound, don't stop her right away. Let her finish the sentence, then have her practice the word where you heard the distortion (e.g., "Could you just read this word for me again before we go on?"). Then let her continue.
- Don't expect 100% perfection all of the time. The goal here is to help her develop the habit of listening to herself and to "become her own speech therapist".

Doing this activity daily can help your child retain and generalize the skills she has learned in speech therapy. Continue doing this activity until your child's articulation is clear in everyday speech without reminders from you.