

Supporting children with unclear speech

You may be aware that your child cannot say a sound or multiple sounds in words correctly. It is important to try and improve the articulation of speech sounds as soon as possible. Schools and parents should work together to address the specific sounds, with the ideal intervention being done for 5 minutes daily. Progress will depend on the time invested in 1-1 adult support.

Learning to say a 'new' or 'correct' sound can take time. It is likened to trying to write with your left hand after using your right hand for many years. However, it is important for the future benefit of all children so they can reach their potential.

Please find a guide to strategies to be used, as advised by professional Speech and Language Therapists.

Acknowledging the error: It is important that when a child says a sound in a word incorrectly that it is acknowledged and repeated back by an adult. For example, if a child says 'Can we go to the tark?,' the adult might say 'You'd like to go to the park? p p p park.'

This allows children to recognise they are using an incorrect sound without criticising them directly.

Producing the sound: Talk about the mouth positioning required to produce the correct sound. For example 'When I make the f sound, my teeth are over my bottom lip' or 'when I make the s sound my tongue is behind my teeth.' Practise the positioning together. Using mirrors can help.

Targeted step 1: Producing the correct sound consistently

Activity 1: Place a piece of card or paper with the focus sound visible along with a sound that children can say correctly. Ask children to place a counter by the correct sound when they hear you say it. Reverse roles so children say the sounds and adults place the counter. Praise effort and achievement, repeating and modelling the correct sound each time.

Activity 2: Take turns to turn over cards, saying the sound as it is turned. This can be used as a matching game.

Activity 3: Make 'stepping stones' for cars, dolls, figures etc. They say the correct sound as they step on it. Each time a sound is incorrectly produced, they go back to the beginning. You can increase the amount of sounds as the game becomes easier.

Targeted step 2: Producing the correct sound in a word.

Activity 1: Matching games with pictures of words children cannot articulate and a word they can. E.g if children cannot produce the 's' sound, use a sun and a moon (if children can say moon correctly.)

As this becomes easier, introduce more 's' (or target sound) words e.g. sock, sack, six. Pictures rather than words should be used.

The stepping stone game can also be adapted for a word level game, adding increasing amounts of words as long as children are being successful in the task.

Targeted step 3: Producing the sound in a sentence.

Play a game where children use a repeated sentence structure like the shopping game. Take turns to say 'I went to the shop and got a....' finishing the sentence with a 's (or target sound)' word. There can be a mixture of words children find difficult and words they can say correctly.

Step 4: Self-regulation

With targeted intervention over a period of time, children should begin to self-correct their own mispronunciations.

The activities suggested can be adapted for all sounds. If your child has a particular interest, try and incorporate this into the games. E.g. Let's help Thomas the Tank Engine over the stepping stones by saying the right sounds/ words.

It is important to focus on one speech sound at a time and ensure children are successful at each step before moving on to the next one. If you feel that after regular, targeted, daily intervention over a period of time that your child is not making progress, please talk to a teacher.