

# Strategies for Improving Speech Sound Production



Parents and teachers play a key role in the development of a child's speech and language skills. Many parents want to help; however, they are not always sure how to begin. Speech sound production (often referred to as articulation or phonological processes) refers to moving the lips and tongue to produce speech sounds in words. Consonant sounds are typically more difficult for children to learn than vowels.

The following strategies are some ideas to try in order to target correct speech sound production:

## STRATEGY #1

*Model good speech.*

- When your child makes errors, repeat the message using the correct speech sounds.
- At appropriate times, have your child repeat the word or sentence after the correct model has been provided. However, keep in mind that interrupting your child during a conversation where he/she is very anxious to say something may not be the most opportune time to stop them mid-sentence in order to have them repeat their sentence using their 'good speech sounds.'
- This often creates frustration and further anxiety.
- Use good judgment in determining appropriate times to intervene and provide good speech models.

## STRATEGY #3

*Use slightly **exaggerated sounds** in your own speech to highlight the sounds you want the student to **focus on and practice**.*

- Pick one or two sounds to emphasize at one time.
- Make the sound longer, as in 's-s-s--l-l-l-eeeping' or louder as in 'STOVE.' When your child says it correctly, provide praise and make note of it by pointing it out to your child to recognize their great effort.
- Give your child opportunities to listen to correct sounds in language models provided by others.
- Don't say 'No, that's not the right sound' instead use a corrective model and say 'Oh yes, that's a s-s-t-ove' even though it may have been incorrectly pronounced as 'tove.'

## STRATEGY #2

*Use **visual, auditory and tactile cues** to model appropriate speech sounds.*

- Use of various cues to emphasize particular speech sounds is often very helpful.
  - For example, for the production of /s/-blend sounds (e.g., stove, sleep, skate, skip) the child may be omitting the 's' sound in all of these words.
- A visual and tactile cue that is particularly useful is sliding a finger along your arm to stretch out the sound and emphasize the 's' sound in these words.
- Along with the visual and tactile cue, further cues may include running a finger along the arm while saying 's-s-s-s-s' to make the 'snake sound' (a variety of things may be chosen to make it easier for the student and to remind the student about the sound that is being targeted).
  - In working on /s/-blend sounds (for example) try separating the 's' sound from the second consonant as in 's-s-s-s-lide' or 's-s-s-s-s-pider' and gradually move the two consonants closer and closer together as it gets easier for him to produce these words.
  - For sounds such as 's' try associating the sound with something familiar while giving a tactile and visual cue (e.g., make the 'snake sound' and give tactile cues like running a finger down the arm to stretch out the sound, also talk about where the tongue is when producing this sound 'put your tongue behind your teeth' or 'smile and keep your tongue behind your teeth' to give encouraging cues for appropriate production of sounds.
  - For the 'z' sound you could call it the 'buzzing bee sound' and say 'lets practice being busy bees and make the 'zzzzzzzz' sound.
- A variety of creative ideas could be used for various sounds. Try different things if one particular cue does not work with your child. The main point is that you give your child feedback and cues so that it makes it easier for them to start producing those troublesome sounds.

## STRATEGY #4

Work on **only one sound** at a time in each word.

- If the child were to say 'tat' for 'catch' for example, don't try to correct the 'c' and the 'ch' sounds at the same time.
- Start by accepting correct production of one sound, then work towards producing all sounds correctly after it gets easier producing one sound correctly.
  - For example, accept 'cat' before moving on to correct and produce 'catch.'

## STRATEGY #6

Be a good **listener**.

- Listen to what your child is saying, and how it is said.
- There are times when it is best to 'ignore' your child's errors. Correcting errors constantly and at inopportune times, instead of responding to the message can sometimes undermine the importance of what your child wants to say to you.
- This in turn can reduce your child's self confidence in their communication approaches.
- In order to improve, your child needs to keep talking, otherwise there will be no speech sounds to work on since he/she will be too self-conscious to speak. It is important to keep talking and communicating a positive experience.

## STRATEGY #5

Use **books and reading activities** as a time for practising speech sounds.

- Using reading times and books to facilitate correct speech sound production is a great way to target particular speech sounds.
- Read to your child or have your child read aloud to someone, or look through magazines and newspapers, etc.
- Talk about vocabulary, and as you talk about books spend time focusing on various sounds.
- Devote part of the reading time to focusing solely on a particular sound (e.g., before beginning reading, discuss with your child that you will spend the first 10 minutes working on the 's' speech sound, for example.
- As you read to your child or he/she reads to you, stop and talk about whether their 'good speech sounds' were used, and comment on any sounds you heard that were 'good sounds'.

### Other strategies during reading:

- If your child reads aloud, remind your child to read slowly and focus on enunciating sounds in words.
- Keep sentences short.
- Pause and do not rush through reading of words.
- Teacher or parent can read to child and repeat key sounds and words to give the child more opportunities to hear the correct sound.

## USE DAILY ROUTINES AND DAILY EVENTS TO TARGET SPEECH SOUND PRODUCTION.

It may be helpful to choose certain daily routines as a time to work on speech sounds. Meals, quiet time (e.g., family time, books, bedtime, bath time), activity time (i.e., cooking, games, sports, etc.) often happen on a regular basis, and it is ideal to use these times as learning opportunities.

- Associating speech with daily routines seems to be more natural, and this will help the student learn to use speech sounds during familiar activities which will also help the student carry appropriate sounds into their own conversations.
- Other possible activities include riding in the car, cleaning, laundry, preparing meals, as well as talking about the weather or days events.
- Overall, have fun while encouraging speech sound production and language learning. It is important to remember that there is a developmental sequence of speech sounds and some sounds develop later than others. The /l, r, th, and v/ sounds are all later developing sounds, therefore, production of these sounds before the age of 7-8 years of age is not expected. Different children acquire speech sounds at different rates.

*With various practice and reminders, your child will begin to make improvements in his/her speech sound production.*