

Help Improve Your Child's Speech Production

Parents play a key role in the development of their child's speech skills. Many parents want to help improve their child's speech, but are not sure exactly what to do. You can encourage your child's speech development by following some simple guidelines:

1. **Expect errors.** All children make some errors in articulation – or speech sound production. In fact, children normally have some errors in speech production until 7 or 8 years old! Be patient and don't expect perfect speech from young children.
2. **Honesty pays.** Be honest when you don't understand what your child is saying. It's ok to admit that you're not sure what was said. Ask the child to tell you again, or say "Show me what you are talking about." Let your child know if you understood part of his or her message. For example, state what you understand and ask for more information. "You're talking about the dog. What did she do?"
3. **Ignore mistakes, and be a good listener.** When people draw attention to speech errors, your child may feel angry or frustrated. Ask your family members to be kind, and ignore your child's speech mistakes. Listen to what your child is trying to tell you, not how it is said. Correcting errors, instead of responding to the message, can undermine your child's confidence as a speaker. If someone is constantly correcting pronunciation errors, your child may begin to speak less and less. Remember, you want talking to be a good experience.
4. **Model good speech.** Children learn good speech by listening to good speech. When your child makes errors, repeat the child's message correctly, but don't ask the child to repeat it after you. For example, if your child says "I tan't fit dis wid", you could repeat and model as: "You can't fix this lid? Maybe I can fix it for you." This way, you're providing a model of correct speech for your child to hear without asking for a correction. Be sure to speak clearly and slowly. In time, your child may begin to correct

errors by repeating back these models. This type of spontaneous self-correction can be a positive way of learning good speech skills.

5. **Fight ear infections.** Good hearing is necessary for the development of normal speech production. Ear infections can cause hearing losses. If your child has even mild or temporary hearing losses during the preschool years, speech and language skills may be delayed. Consider consulting your family physician when you suspect your child has an ear infection.
6. **Read, read, read.** Reading to your child daily is a great way to improve language skills and model good speech production. If you know your child is working on the "s" sound, you can emphasize it by making it a little longer or louder while you read. By emphasizing a sound, as in "housssssse", you are giving your child an enhanced opportunity to hear the sound. Do not correct the child if the word is repeated incorrectly, just say, "Yes, this is a housssse", even though he or she may have called it a "hout."
7. **Complete speech homework together.** If your child is enrolled in speech therapy, you may receive pages of speech homework that should be completed and returned to school. This homework is designed to reinforce the progress your child is making in speech. Before sending homework, the speech-language pathologist will make sure your child can easily say the words or sentences containing the target sound. That way, he or she will be successful when practicing with you at home. We want this home speech time to be an encouraging and positive opportunity for practicing speech sounds. Be sure to sign the homework before returning it to school.
8. **Ask questions.** Don't hesitate to call the speech-language pathologist if you have any questions about your child's progress. By working together, your child can have a positive and encouraging experience improving communication skills!