

Listening for speech sounds

One of the foundation steps in working on speech sounds is to develop speech sound awareness. This means that your child needs to be able to hear the difference between speech sounds before they can use them.

Your therapist will have assessed your child and identified some sounds that they might need to build awareness of as they are not yet using them or if they are confusing them with others. They will also have provided you with some resources.

It is important to note that when saying the sounds to your child, you need to use the sound (phonetic) not the letter name e.g. “ffffff” not “ef” or “fuh”. Your therapist will be able to model this on request.

Stage 1 - Hearing the difference between sounds

Your therapist will have provided you with one or more target sounds. Work with one at a time to start with.

Familiarise your child with the sound cards by associating the sounds with the pictures. You can do this by showing them the card and making the sound. They don't need to copy you, just listen.

Encourage them to look for visual clues to support their listening, show them how the sound is made, e.g. 'look for the bitey sound' 'f' or 'are my lips touching?' for 'p/b' or 'is my mouth wide open' for 'k/g' or 'is it a hissy sound like a snake?' for 's'.

Ideas for listening for one sound:

Bricks: Have your child listen for the target sound, each time they hear it they can add a brick to a tower.

Posting: Use several copies of the same sound card. Make a range of other sounds along with the target sound and have your child post a card into a cereal/shoe box each time they hear the target sound.

Jumping: Have a picture of the sound card on the floor. Each time your child hears that sound they can jump on the card.

Running: Stick the sound card on the wall and give your child a mark on the floor to stand on, each time they hear the target sound, they run to touch the picture on the wall.

Stage 2 - Hearing when the sound is at the beginning of a word

So now we want your child to listen for the sound when at the beginning of a simple word. Focus on words that only use one consonant sound at first, we call this a consonant-vowel (CV) word. The following are examples of CV words: tea, me, say, pay, moo, two, bee, sea, key, car, tar.

Begin by showing the child an example: so if the target sound was 'p' you might give examples of simple words starting with 'p': pie, pay, pea, pour, pear. If you find generating CV words you can always ask your therapist to give you some ideas.

Time to practise, it can sometimes work to play with rhyme at this point, e.g. if your target sound was 'p' you might say 'sigh, my, buy, pie' and your child would need to indicate that they heard 'p' at the beginning of the word 'pie'. You don't have to use rhyming words though. You can use similar activities to the ones above for this activity. Again, encourage them to look for visual clues as well by looking at you when you speak.

You could also get your child to listen for the sound at the end of words. So if your target word was 'k' you might use simple words like ark, oak, eek, or park, soak, peak.

Stage 3 – Listening for a range of sounds

If you have been set more than one target sound and been through the previous stages with each sound, you could now play games for listening for a range of sounds.

Ideas for activities:

Lotto: Make a lotto board by drawing lines on a piece of paper to make spaces for the number of target sounds. Stick the target sound cards somewhere else in the room, a wall, table, the fridge. Then the child needs to fetch the right card for the sound they hear and put it on the board.

Jumping/running: put the cards on the floor or on the wall around the room. Then ask the child to jump on or run to the picture for the target sound they hear.

Puppets/teddies: ask your child to listen to a puppet/teddy saying words. When a word begins with one of your child's sounds he/she can put a counter on the correct sound picture.

Sorting: Choose two target sounds and gather together objects or pictures beginning with this sound. Then have your child sort the objects/pictures into two boxes/baskets or post boxes.