

Helping with speech sounds

It is quite normal for young children to mispronounce some speech sounds in words, as like any skill the development of speech sounds takes time. Some speech sounds are used when children are younger, such as “p, b, m”, while others may arrive much later, such as “l or th”. Making speech sounds and word errors tend to be a normal part of childhood and is usually nothing to worry about.

You can help your child’s speech by following these tips as you go through your day.

Don’t try and get your child to correct their speech.

Making them say it again rarely works and can be frustrating or upsetting for your child. Instead, repeat back tricky words and don’t put pressure on them to say it again. They can’t say it the same way as you yet and it will be frustrating for you both to try before they are ready.

e.g. they say “I saw a tow” , you say “yes it was a cow”

We call this “modelling”. It gives them an opportunity to hear the correct sounds without any pressure to say it. Do lots of modelling with those speech sounds your child is finding hardest.

Don’t over emphasise a word as that may make it sounds strange. Help your child listen to the tricky sounds by saying the words they find hard more often. E.g. Look at the cat. He’s a big cat.

Use clues to help you understand

If your child is hard to understand, talk to them where you have plenty of clues about the words they may be trying to use e.g. when sharing a book

When they are talking about things you can both see it will be easier to guess what they are saying. This will be less frustrating for your child and encourage them to talk more. You can also use these times to do lots of modelling of the sounds they need to hear.

Support your child in new situations or with new people

It might help to give other adults in your child life the versions of the words he uses e.g. he says damdaw for grandpa. Spend time talking to your child and “translating” for them with their teacher or playgroup leader, so they begin to “tune in” to your child.

Don’t pretend you understand your child when you don’t!

If you cannot understand what your child is saying, try to explain this and ask them to try again, show you, or give you more detail.

If you think you understand one or two words repeat these back – hopefully this will encourage them to keep talking and explain further.

If you have to give up, it can be helpful to say to the child “let’s save that one till later”. In different circumstances it may become clearer what they were trying to say.

For further advice and resources for parents visit www.talkingpoint.org

Together with you, in your local community