

Speech Stimulation: Guidelines for Parents and Caregivers

Children in speech therapy make much faster progress when parents work with the child at home. The more you practice with your child... the faster your child will improve!

The following are tips for working with your child at home:

Motivation for Practice

Tokens: When practicing speech sounds, use a type of “token” as a reward for each correct production. Tokens can be pennies, poker chips, pieces from a game, or other small, colorful items. Hold the token by the side of your mouth to bring the child’s attention to your face. Produce the sound or word as the child watches your mouth. Then have the child imitate the sound or word.



Containers: If the child imitates the sound or word correctly (or makes a good attempt), say “Good talking!” and put the token in a container. The container may be a bottle, box or can. A plastic bottle works well because the child can see and hear the tokens in the bottle, but cannot get his/her hands in the bottle to play with them. If you use a box or coffee can, cut out and paste a picture of a face (such as Cookie Monster) on the lid. Then make a slit for the mouth. This way, the child can “feed” the tokens to the character after imitating the sound or word.

Games: Speech practice can also be worked into ordinary children’s games, such as Go Fish or Candy Land. Each player must win five tokens (by saying five sounds, words or sentences) before making a move.

Other players: Have other people, including other children, win tokens or play the game. This will allow your child to hear more correct sound productions and help the child identify incorrect productions (which the other person does occasionally on purpose).

Rewards: Once the child earns all the tokens, give him a reward or allow him to “buy” a prize. You can have him trade his tokens for little prizes, such as a sticker, balloon or cookie. For an older child, you can have him collect his tokens each day and later exchange them for a big prize (such as a toy) or an activity (like going to the park).

Provide positive feedback. After each speech sound attempt, say positive things to your child, such as “Good try,” or “Good talking.” Do not say words like “wrong,” “bad,” or “not right.”

Practice Sequence

Practice sounds in a sequence from easy to hard. Using the /k/ sound as an example, practice the sound in the following sequence:

- in the beginning of a syllable with the vowel that sounds like “uh” (**k**uh)
- at the beginning of syllables with different vowels (**k**ay, **k**ee, **k**ie, **k**o, **k**u)
- in words that begin with the sound (**c**at)
- in words that end with the sound (**ba**k)
- in sentences by starting with a “carrier phrase.” For example: “I **c**an_____.”
“I **c**ame to the_____.” “My **c**at ate a_____.”
- in sentences that are made up to include words with the sound

Note that the speech sound may be spelled different ways. For example, the /k/ sound can be spelled with a /c/. Once your child can produce the sound correctly most of the time at one level, then you can move on to the next level.

Practice Schedule

Practice length: A practice session may be as long as 15 minutes, or as short as 30 seconds, depending on the child’s age and attention span.

Practice location and times: Practice can be done informally throughout the day in a variety of locations. It can be done while doing daily chores, just before dinner, or while riding in the car. (Be sure to keep a list of words or practice material in the car.) For older children, practice can be done when doing school homework. Have the child underline the sound in his or her homework. Then have the child read the homework out loud, being careful to say the sound correctly. The same can be done with other books or magazines.

Practice frequency: Practice frequency is more important than practice length. A few short practice sessions (five minutes or less) per day can actually be more effective than one long session per day.

For more information, please contact the Division of Speech-Language Pathology at (513) 636-4341 or visit our website at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech.