

Speech Advice after your baby's surgery

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What You Can Do to Help Speech

Your baby will have started to babble at 4 to 6 months of age. Your baby's early babble would have been affected by their cleft palate. Often sounds such as m and n are easier for your baby to make before the cleft is repaired.

After their surgery, your baby needs help to learn sounds which they have never said before. These are sounds which require the palate to close against the throat, such as p, b, t, d, f, v, s, sh, ch, j, k, and g.

This section gives advice on routines, games and activities to help your child's speech.

Check out the **“helpful on line video resources”** section to see videos where you can see parents and therapists helping their children's speech during play activities

Speech Sound Modelling (Showing Your Child Speech Sounds)

As your child is still young, we advise that parents show sounds in a visual, clear way during play activities. The focus is very much on play, and ***there is no expectation on the child to do or say anything at this stage.***

Instead, they are **listening, watching** and **feeling** as you show certain sounds. By hearing, seeing and feeling sounds over and over again, your child is more likely to absorb them into their early sound patterns.

In time, it is hoped that your child will consciously try to copy your sounds, but this might take months and is not expected at first.

Sounds to Focus On: p, b, t, d, and s

Tips about how to produce the sounds

- p – make this sound **quietly** so it is whispered and not a loud ‘puh’.
- b – make this sound gently
- t – make this sound quietly so it is whispered. Also, stick out your tongue so it is between your teeth when making this sound. This provides a more useful, visual

model for your child to see.

- d – make this sound louder so it is produced ‘duh’. Also stick out your tongue so it is between your teeth when making this sound. This provides a more useful visual model for your child to see.
- s – make this sound quietly (‘ssss’ not ‘suh’) Again, stick out your tongue for this sound, so it is produced like a ‘thhh’ as this provides a visual model for your child to see.

More Tips.....

Don't produce the sounds forcefully. If you do, your child might produce sounds with extra stress or force (which might encourage use of throaty, growly sounds). If your child does make growly or throat noises, do not copy them. Acknowledge them by smiling back but show the correct sound, e.g. ‘p, p, p’ or ‘b, b, b’ instead. This encourages sounds to be made at the front of the mouth.

Eye contact and being close to your child is essential but ***do not tell, or try to make, your child look at your face.*** If they are not interested, just try again another time.

It might seem strange to show /t/, /d/ and /s/ sounds with the tongue between the teeth. We do this because children with repaired clefts can sometimes have a preference for making sounds at the back of the throat. By making the sounds with the tongue between the teeth, it is an extra visual “hint” for the child that these sounds are made at the front of the mouth. This will help your child to realise the sound is at the front of the mouth which will help them to make the sounds in the

correct place.

Using Sounds in Play Activities and Routines....

Young babies love looking at the faces of adults who care for them, so you can use everyday activities to help them to see, hear and feel speech sounds you want your child to eventually make themselves.

When playing with objects the child is interested in, hold the object up to your face /mouth. This way, when the child looks at the object of interest, they will also look at your mouth, giving you an opportunity to show sounds that your child can see, hear and feel.

You can help your child to feel the flow of air through the mouth for a sound by playfully making the sound on their hand e.g. blowing an /s/ sound on their hand or making a gentle /p/ sound on their hand so that they can feel the puffs of air on their hand as you do so.

Make the sounds during play activities to make it fun and engaging for your child. This type of activity needs to be little and often and can be done in a variety of settings (such as bath time, meal times).

- **Blow raspberries and kisses**, make funny sounds sticking your tongue out ('a-la-a-la') and blow on hot food. These all encourage forward tongue placement, as well as increasing awareness of air

flowing through the mouth instead of down the nose.

- **Imitating** tongue and lip movements, puffing out cheeks, blowing kisses, wiggling your tongue, all encourage babies and children to use their mouth and tongue. This is great to do at lunch time when you're sitting close to your baby.
- **Bath time** is a great time to blow bubbles or scoop up bath foam and blow it, or blow raspberries.
- **Bubbles.** Put the bubble wand next to your mouth (to model 'p, p, p' or 'b, b, b'). Once your child has watched the sounds, blow the bubbles.
- As you pop the bubbles, gently say 'pop, pop' as this emphasises the p sound. You might also do this when washing up.
- **Changing time.** Use phrases such as 'arms **up**', 'top **off**' to emphasise the last sound in the word. Remember to use the sound gently.
- **Jigsaw puzzles.** Hold up a piece of the jigsaw (near your mouth) and show 't, t, t' or 'd, d, d' for your child to see. Once they have seen the sounds, give them the jigsaw piece to put in the puzzle.

Using Sounds in Play Activities and Routines continued...

- **Blocks:** Hold the block close to your face and model a quiet “b” sound for your child to hear – then give them the block to build/put in a box.
- **Car track.** Ask your child to look at a toy car and hold it near your mouth and model ‘ssss, ssss’. Praise them for doing ‘good looking’ and then give them the car to roll down the track.
- **Posting.** Select objects to post and put them in a bag. Ask your child to feel in the bag to pick an object. Take the object, place it near your mouth and model some of the sounds (for example, ‘d, d, d’). Praise your child for ‘good looking’ and let them post the object.
- Make **animal noises** and environmental noises, such as ‘brmm’, ‘beep’, ‘meeow’, ‘baaa’.
- Don’t forget favourite toys which contain front sounds (such as Peppa Pig, Bob the Builder, Paw Patrol)

Listening and Language Activities

In addition to sound work, it's important to develop listening skills as these are key in helping your child to develop new words and speech sounds. Babies need to hear a new word many times before trying to say it.

Listening tips

- Cut down background noise (TV or radio) when talking and playing with your child. This helps them to hear your voice easily, and particularly the quiet speech sounds such as p, t.
- Sit opposite your baby and get down to their level so they can see your face and mouth.
- Play with musical instruments, shakers and toys which play tunes, as this also develops listening skills.
- Listen to everyday noises with your baby, and draw attention to them, for example, the phone ringing, vacuum cleaner, doorbell.
- Play waiting games where you say, 'Ready, steady, go!' This encourages your child to wait and listen before doing an action.

Language tips

- Watch your child playing and follow their lead. Use simple language to comment on what they are doing (for example, 'car – brum, brum', 'train – choo-choo'). Do not use long, complex sentences.
- Give choices and label objects in everyday routines. 'Banana or apple?', 'Milk or water?'

- Copy your child's sounds and attempts at words. This teaches them how to take turns in early conversations.
- In everyday routines or in play, comment on what you are doing using simple language (for example, 'Mummy's turn', 'Daddy's cooking')
- Vary the pitch and volume of your voice and use exaggerated facial expressions.
- Play repetitive games such as 'peepo', nursery rhymes and songs to develop your baby's language.

If You're Speaking More Than 1 Language.

There are many benefits to children speaking more than one language and speaking more than one language will not have a negative effect on your child's speech.

Use your own language when you speak to your child. You may be keen for your child to learn English for school but this can wait. Children often learn English very easily once they start at play school. If you and your child's other parent speak 2 different languages and you would like your child to learn both, you should each speak to them in your own language. Your child will automatically learn these 2 languages.