

Strategies to support unclear speech in younger children

- Respond to what your child says instead of how they say it.

Try and avoid correcting them when they say a word incorrectly or unclearly. Drawing attention to their errors can make a child embarrassed and may reduce their willingness to speak, especially if they are already aware that they find certain sounds difficult.

- Repeat what the child says providing a correct speech model.

If the child makes a speech error, repeat back what they have said back inserting the correct speech sound. You can emphasise the sound they find difficult by putting a little more stress on that sound, for example:

Child: I've got a bish

Adult: Yes you've got a fish.

- Don't make the child repeat words.

It's not helpful to ask your child to copy you or repeat the word because they will probably still make the same error. They may not realise that they are saying it incorrectly too, for example:

Child: That's Uncle Tom's tar.

Adult: It's Tom's car, say car.

Child: tar

Adult: No car, try again.

Child: I said tar!

- Reinforce sounds they find difficult

Give your child plenty of opportunities to hear the sound in words in everyday activities such as play, story time or meal time, for example:

Child: Look, the tat is hiding.

Adult: Yes the **cat** is hiding behind the box. That **cat** is so cheeky. He's a cheeky **cat**.

- Ask the child to show you what they mean

If you are having difficulty understanding what the child is saying/asking for, ask them if they can show you what they mean, for example by showing you the object that they are requesting.

- Don't pretend to understand if you haven't

Show the child that you have understood part of what they have said as this will encourage them to keep going and try again, for example:

Child: I want to det a patet of tibs

Adult: You want to get..?

Child: A patet of tisps (pointing to the snack cupboard)

Adult: A packet of crisps?

Child: Yes!

- Use forced alternatives

If the child has been working with a Speech and Language Therapist and they are now able to use a sound in words and sentences, you can use forced alternatives in order to support them to generalise their speech to all situations, for example:

Child: Where's my toat?

Adult: Do you mean toat or coat?

Child: Coat!