

A Parent's Guide To:
Home
Reinforcement

How to Support Your Child in Speech
Therapy



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1. Introduction

10 Warning Signs Of A Speech Disorder In Your Child

What exactly is a speech disorder?

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, a speech disorder is when a person is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, or where normal speech is disrupted. Articulation disorders, speech impediment, and stuttering are examples of speech disorders. Both adults and children can suffer from speech disorders and they can occur as a result of a medical problem or have no known cause. Speech disorders involve difficulty in producing certain sounds such as "s" or "r". As your child matures, his or her speech pattern should become more understandable and generally, he should be speaking clearly by the age of

eight. While all children develop at different rates, it's important to ensure that your child is showing continuous language growth and progression. Depending on the specific speech condition of your child symptoms can vary, but there are some essential signs that every parent should watch for as their children grow and develop.

10 Communication Milestones

1. Your child does not interact socially starting in infancy
2. He does not follow or understand what you say (starting at 1 year)
3. She says only a few sounds, words, or gestures (18 months to 2 years)
4. Her words are not easily understood (18 months to 2 years)
5. She does not combine words (starting at 2 years)
6. He has a limited vocabulary (age 2-3 years)
7. She says p, b, m, h, and w incorrectly in words (1-2 years)
8. She says k, g, f, t, d, and n incorrectly in words (2-3 years)
9. He produces speech that is unclear, even to familiar people (2-3 years)
10. He is not using 2-3 word sentences to ask for things (by 3 years)

If you think your child is exhibiting any of these warning signs of speech disorder, it's important to seek the advice of a pediatrician or speech language therapist. **Early intervention is the key** to prevention and elimination of a speech disorder at any age. For additional detailed information, The **National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)** has an online checklist available for parents who are concerned about their children's speech and communication development.

Will My Child Outgrow His Speech Challenge?



This question not only nags at all parents who are faced with addressing a child's speech challenge, but is one that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) must seriously consider before beginning treatment. This chapter aims to shed some light on this often murky question and to arm you with better information so that you may be more informed partners in the treatment decision-making process.

Three Factors Determine if a Speech Challenge Can Be Outgrown

The three most important factors, in general order of importance, for determining whether a speech challenge is likely or unlikely to spontaneously correct are the age of the child, severity of the child's speech challenge, and a child's and/or his family history of a speech challenge. The SLP must carefully weigh each factor, often in conjunction with a speech screening or full evaluation, to come up with a more definitive decision on whether to proceed with therapy.

1. How old is your child?

Speech is the most complex thing we humans do on a daily basis, from a motoric, movement-based standpoint. Therefore, it shouldn't be surprising that it can

take time for the average child to develop accurate, fluent speech. Perhaps the first question SLPs ask of a parent who contacts them is: "how old is your child?" In reality, certain misarticulations are, in fact, normal. For example, it is normal for a three-year old to say "wock" for "rock". Should that child continue to substitute /w/ for /r/ at age seven, that would almost certainly be something that should be clinically

addressed. But, this question of age of the child represents a bit of a balancing act. Research continues to reveal that intervening early is absolutely key. Yet we wouldn't want to intervene in a case where the child would spontaneously correct his errors (i.e. "grow out of it"). If there's any doubt regarding this question of age with a particular speech error, the next thing SLPs do is look at the child's overall level of speech intelligibility and how many different speech sounds he is having trouble with.

2. How severe is the speech challenge?

Let's assume a misarticulated /r/ is the only sound a child is



having difficulty with. This would very likely represent a mild articulation disorder. Typically, an SLP will adopt a “wait and see” approach if that child is still in kindergarten or below. However, with every six month period with no self-correction, the SLP will be more likely to recommend treatment. If that same kindergartner has difficulty with /s/, /sh/, in addition to the /r/, the SLP would be much more likely to recommend treatment as soon as possible.

3. What is the family history of speech challenges?

The next consideration that certainly goes hand in hand

with the severity of a child’s misarticulations is whether that child has had a history of speech errors and/or speech therapy or if speech errors run in that child’s family. If a child was seen by an SLP at age three to treat, for example, misarticulated /k, g, v, f/, then it is considerably more likely that a misarticulated /s/ or /r/ at age five will also require treatment. In these cases, especially with /s/, an SLP will sometimes bump down his age threshold for treatment to 4 years. Since, there is a strong genetic connection in speech challenges.

If an older sibling or parent had therapy, SLPs tend to address a child’s speech

challenges a little earlier than they normally would when no family history of speech challenges is present.

A full speech evaluation by a licensed SLP is the most definitive answer to whether a child may outgrow his speech challenge. However, many parents may not need to go to those lengths to get a better sense of where their child’s speech stands. Age, severity and child/family history of speech challenges are all highly significant factors in determining whether to intervene at a given juncture. Knowing this information should empower you to help make better decisions in your child’s development journey.



2. Parent Involvement

How To Develop Correct Speech Habits At Home

Whether or not your child has been diagnosed with a speech sound disorder, there are many things you can do at home to help develop correct speech habits. You can even start developing these habits

when your child makes his first babbles! Every child develops at a different rate and there is a wide range of what is considered normal in a child's language development. You can take an active role in

helping encourage your child's speech and language development, just by adding a few easy steps into your daily routine. Here are a few tips for you depending on the age of the child.

From Birth through Two Years Old:

- **Imitate** your baby's actions and facial expressions.
- **Teach** your child to imitate your actions. Think of actions such as clapping your hands, blowing kisses, playing peek-a-boo with your hands.
- **Narrate** your day. Talk about the activities that you are doing such as taking a bath, going for a walk, putting on clothes, eating dinner.
- **Identify** colors, alphabet letters or numbers when you see them.
- **Demonstrate** the sounds that animals make, for example when you see a dog, make the "woof" sound, or the "meow" sound for a cat.
- **Use** real words rather than using baby talk. Sure it's cute, but the earlier your child hears language spoken properly, the earlier your child will begin to use it.



Age Two through Four Years Old:

- Use concise, **clear speech** that is easy for your child to understand.
- Ask **leading questions** that can't be answered with a simple Yes or No. For example, "Which piece of fruit would you like?" or "What would you like to do today?"
- Teach your child simple nursery rhymes or songs that demonstrate **patterns of speech**.
- **Encourage description** by pointing out pictures of family members and friends in photos. Ask your child to identify whom she is seeing in the picture.



Age Four through Six Years Old:

- Expand on your child's speech and reiterate what he has said by repeating the phrase in a **complete sentence**. For example, if your child is saying "black dog", answer your child with "you are right, that is a big black dog outside."
- Ask your child to **discuss** his or her day, rather than simply asking, "How was your day?" You can have your child tell you three favorite things that happened in the day.
- Practice **attentive listening**. Its hard when we have a busy house, but the more you can show your child you are interested by giving him good eye contact and paying attention to what he is saying, the more often you'll find him talking to you.
- **Be patient**. Your child is taking in the world around him at lightening speed! Give him a chance to respond in a thoughtful way.

You may already be incorporating these steps into your daily communication, and if so – good job! If not, try to add one or two more strategies to your communication with your child. Before you know it, the two of you will be engaging in a satisfying and most likely entertaining conversation!

7 Ways To Build Confidence In Kids With Speech Disorders

Speech disorders and delays can not only effect how children are able to communicate, but also their confidence and self-esteem. When this happens, their behavior, learning, and relationships can be affected to various degrees. In fact, some researchers propose that kids with speech delays can be more at risk for things such as bullying because they can seem more reclusive. There are ways, however, that parents, teachers, and caregivers can help build confidence and ease frustrations.

1. Help them meet other kids with speech disorders.

If your child is the only one in his class with a speech delay, he might already feel the pressure of being different. Introduce him to other kids who face some of the same challenges. When kids feel like they are not the only ones experiencing a

challenge, they feel a sense of belonging. Belonging – having comrades – not only helps to provide comfort, but can be a great resource for support and possible tools for speech therapy techniques.

2. Teach them how to set goals that build confidence.

We gain confidence in part from experiencing failure, trying again, and achieving success. The goals don't need to be about anything speech related, but maybe a hobby or school project. Talk about how to set goals that are specific and broken down into steps – not just generalized statements like I want to become a great hockey player.

3. Include exercise and healthy eating and sleeping habits.

Research has shown that overall physical health is closely tied with mental health. Make sure your kids have lots of opportunities for healthy physical activity, and that they are getting enough rest at night. Pay attention to their diets, too, because some foods can cause hyperactivity in some children, making it harder for them to focus and feel like they can accomplish their goals. Exercises like yoga can have calming effects on both the mind and the body.

Did you know...

Michael Phelps, one of the greatest Olympians of all time with a record 22 medals (18 of them gold!) has a lisp.



4. Pay attention to your own communication with your kids.

As parents we say so much to our own kids, even without words. No matter if kids are struggling with speech disorders, learning disabilities, bullying, or family issues, as parents we need to show them that our relationship with them is solid, and that we have confidence in their abilities. Maintain eye contact when they are speaking with you, don't finish their sentences for them, and give them enough time to communicate with you.

5. Volunteer together.

Sometimes the best way to take the focus off of one's own problems or challenges is to help someone else overcome their own. Volunteering gives kids the opportunities to meet others with challenges, learn about their own capabilities, and accomplish goals. Look for ways to volunteer together that highlight your child's strengths and don't rely on communication skills.

6. Avoid constant praise.

Even though it sounds counterintuitive, praise doesn't necessarily build confidence. Instead, point out to your child the facts without adding extra value. Talk about things your child has mastered, and ask them what they are working on learning or doing next. It is also important to remember that there is a fine line between praising the child and praising the process. Praise the effort and the action, but don't place the value directly on the person.

7. Help them find opportunities to build self-esteem.

Kids who have hobbies or special interests can have more opportunities for success, which can help build confidence. Encourage your child to take a cooking or art class, join a sport team, or take up a hobby she can do at home with you. These activities that focus on other abilities and strengths provide positive outlets for energy and personal growth.



Make S.M.A.R.T Speech Therapy Goals

Speech therapy can be tiring, hard work, and sometimes even a source of insecurity among peers. With the SLP help your son or daughter set and reach speech therapy goals using a traditional business model – S.M.A.R.T. – and you’ll find that speech therapy might just get a little easier, and the goals a little closer.

S- Specific: Establish very specific goals. The general goal of “improve articulation” can seem overwhelming and unobtainable for kids. The more specific the goal the greater the likelihood that your child will feel empowered and capable. Answer the following questions:

- Who? (child, child w/parent, or child/SLP combo)
- What? (specific goal)
- When? (days/times during week)
- Where? (at SLP’s office, in home, on the go)
- How? (any extra tools/supplies needed)

M- Measurable: Look for measurable ways your child can work on speech therapy goals. This might mean playing 2 vocabulary games, completing 3 worksheets, or attending a month of therapy appointments.

A- Achievable: Some speech disorders are more difficult to treat than others and the goals for your child should be achievable based on his specific challenges. Make sure your child has the resources needed to make the goals achievable, both in time and in tangible supplies. Help your child navigate any obstacles that might otherwise prevent him from tackling the goal.

R- Realistic: Make sure that the steps needed to reach the goal are healthy, logical, and in line with the overall objectives of the SLP. A goal of “no stuttering by end of summer” for a child who is just beginning speech therapy for stuttering is not only unlikely to happen so swiftly (if at all), but it can create an unhealthy self-image for the child. A better goal would be “improve pacing of speech during class presentations” because it is specific and uses positive language.

T- Timely: Make sure to incorporate time-related markers for the goals. Time is tangible, measurable, and specific. Some examples of these might be:

- Work on speech therapy flashcards for 15 minutes 4 days a week
- Improve articulation when reading the /r/ sounds book in 3 weeks
- Attend speech therapy group sessions at least 2 times this month



Tips For Keeping Your Child Motivated to Achieve His Speech Goals

Despite the bubbles and the iPads, speech therapy isn't always all fun and games, it can be hard work! Speech therapy can be challenging for a host of reasons. It often occurs in small spaces, at a tabletop, and a variety of demands are placed on the child. While the goal of therapy is to work towards achieving goals, it's also to keep kids motivated. Like most things in life, motivation is key and can have a significant impact on progress. Make sure you and the SLP are on the same page and understand what motivates your child to succeed.



Variables that Impact Progress in Speech Therapy.

Age: A lot of variables come with the child's age. Older children might be aware of their speech and language challenges and motivated to improve them. Conversely, they might feel self-conscious and easily discouraged when therapy doesn't come easy. For young children, in particular, it is often difficult for them to comprehend the goal of therapy and therefore, **play-based tasks are essential** in keeping them engaged and interested.

Attention: Children might struggle with a variety of attention difficulties including sensory needs, distractability, impulsivity or other communication barriers such as poor comprehension that make therapy a struggle. **A tangible token system may be helpful.**

Know what motivates your child.

To keep your child engaged, first, decide what motivates him. This may seem obvious but what does your child like? Make sure the therapist is aware of what motivates your child. Generic stickers are not always good enough to float every child's boat.

Rewards

Rewards can be great at keeping children working towards the end of an activity. Be sure to alert the child as to how much work they have to do in order to earn the reward (work for 10 minutes, 5 worksheets, 10 articulation targets). A reward can be almost anything, here are some ideas:

- Music (play song, a part of a song, or sing it)
- Videos (watch a clip, make your own)
- Puzzle pieces (one at a time)
- Sticker charts
- Games (anything goes here, basketball, iPad, etc)
- Points earned for good work

Rewards during therapy and or homework need to be short, to keep the focus of therapy on the actual work at hand. Some children appreciate being given a choice between rewards. It might be best offer them choices before they work, therefore feeling a little more ownership over the activity.

Motivating Activities During Therapy

If a child really likes a subject or character (Elmo, Thomas the Train, dogs), try to make it the subject of speech therapy. For example, use multiple exemplars of a character, such as wearing different outfits, colors or doing different actions to elicit vocabulary (e.g., yellow Elmo, red Elmo, Elmo running, Elmo dancing). Using the characters in your lesson is sometimes enough to keep kids interested without additional rewards.



Do not forget the value of verbal praise and positive comments!

3. At Home Activities

Speech Therapy Exercises For Children

There are a wide variety of reasons to work on speech therapy exercises at home. Sometimes, a parent is not sure if her child needs to see a speech therapist and would like to do some speech therapy exercises at home first. Perhaps your child's teacher has expressed concern that he has some stuttering, or needs help in speech skills. Or, your child is

already seeing an SLP and you would like to supplement what he is learning with at-home activities.

Here is a list of exercises, tools and activities just for you. Each exercise is designed to engage your child and stimulate language and speech production. Remember, therapy sessions, especially for children under

the age of three should be FUN! Your child may not cooperate if he feels like he is in a formal learning environment. Children need to enjoy their activities in order to learn. While a little structure is okay, let your child walk around the room, wiggle and giggle to get the most out of your time together.

Music

Many children sing more than they talk! Through singing and song, children can actually achieve improved articulation skills, just from belting it out. Even simple children's nursery rhymes can help develop pronunciation and articulation skills. For children who need any type of speech and language therapy, music is essential. It is motivating, familiar, rhythmic, stimulates a variety of senses and most of all - FUN!

Music as speech therapy is often used in early intervention of a speech impediment or disorder. "The Wheels on the Bus," "Row Row Row your Boat" or "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" are staples of an SLP's repertoire. Music is essential to our younger generation's growth and development.



Flash Cards

Flash cards can help kids in speech therapy to focus on the sounds that they have difficulty with. You can help make it more entertaining by providing an activity for kids to do along with them or a reward when done correctly. For example, a small piece of candy (chewable is good for strengthening jaw muscles) after saying a certain number of sounds on the language cards correctly.

Mirror Exercises

Many kids with articulation problems don't understand how to move their mouths to make sounds correctly. Speaking in front of a mirror can help a child to see how her mouth moves when she makes particular sounds. You can articulate each sound slowly and correctly to model proper positioning for your child and demonstrate the differences in the mirror.

Frog Hop

This is a simple game to help get your child to repeat the same word six times. Choose six words that you want to practice. Slide each word into a clear plastic paper protector, aka "lily pads". Spread the plastic lily pads all over the room. Have your child hop to each lily pad, each time saying the word. After he hops to all six of the lily pads and says the word correctly, your little frog may want a tasty fly as a reward!

Guess Who?

This is a fun board game by Hasbro that helps children identify everyday items such as cars, animals, foods and sea creatures. Not only does this game teach problem-solving, it encourages proper character identification and socialization skills. Beware, you may find yourself playing it over and over!

5 Ways To Use Technology For Speech Therapy At Home

Can technology help dedicate time to working on speech therapy at home? Absolutely! If you have access to mobile device such as an iPad, there are many free apps and online resources that can help your child improve his or her communication skills with speech therapy at home. Here are some great resources for you.

Articulation Station – A free app from Little Bee Speech with six different engaging activities. The design of the app is built to follow a process of articulation therapy that focuses on words, sentences, and story building. It can be used at home by parents or as part of a speech therapy program. Also, look for the recently reviewed Articulation Test Center app in which our own Gordy Rogers gave it two thumbs up!

Pinterest – Yes, even Pinterest has educational, inspirational and fun activities that you can do with your children. You will find “apps of the week”, ideas for sound articulation games, etc.

Speech Buddies University – If you’re looking for free online access to customized word games, you don’t have to look any further than right here at Speech Buddies. You can join our online University to gain access to a practice schedule that you can follow with your child. Speech Buddies University can be used with or without Speech Buddies tools and is a terrific complement to speech therapy in a clinic or speech therapy at home.

Playing With Words 365 – This site that is dedicated to helping kids improve speech has a “freebies” page filled with free, effective, and engaging activities and ideas for your little ones. You’ll find resources for vocabulary, writing and reading concepts, speech and sound development, and much more.

House of Learning by Smarty Ears – This is a creative app for the iPad that was developed by a speech language pathologist to serve as a tool for learning and playing. This app helps children practice language skills, in particular prepositions and story-telling.



Look For Proven Specific Tools: Speech Buddies

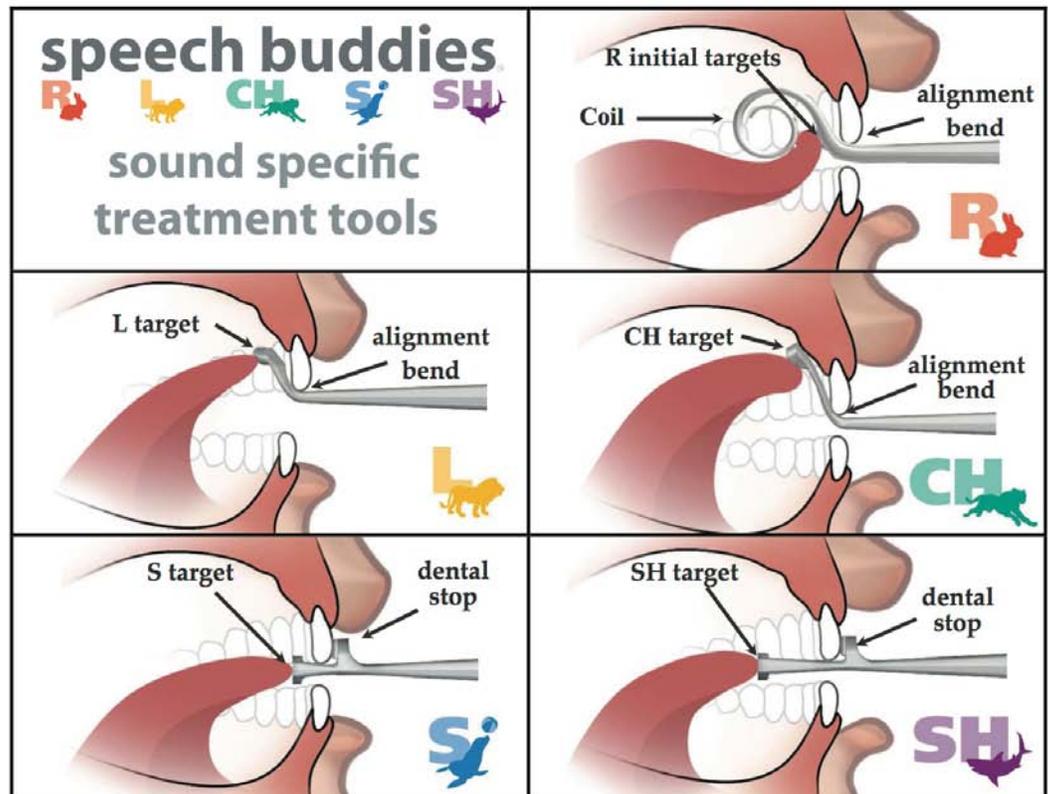
Hand-held items are often effective tools for speech therapy. Tactile tools target a range of skill sets from fine and gross motor, articulation, voice and stuttering, listening and sensory skills. Tactile tools allow kids to practice speech sounds, provide appropriate sensory options and can be used in any setting, whether it be home, at a speech therapist's office or even at school.

What about that old wives tale about using a straw or a whistle as a speech therapy tool? Yes, sometimes people turn towards these devices to help their child learn to articulate properly. But, these items are not scientifically proven as effective speech therapy tools. Sure they may be inexpensive and easy to find, but they are not meant to help your child overcome his speech disorder. Instead, **look for proven specific tools** that help teach a child correct tongue placement. This is where Speech Buddies can be an excellent option.

Speech Buddies provides a specific target so students can feel and hear exactly how to pronounce sounds. While we still recommend you visit your pediatrician or SLP first, these tools are effective treatment options to use at home or in conjunction with your speech therapist to help address speech disorders.

Hand-held tools: Speech Buddies help any type of articulation disorder. These tools teach the correct tongue

positioning for five of the most difficult sounds, R, S, L, CH and SH. Designed by a team of expert speech-language pathologists and engineers, the tools have been tested in numerous clinical studies and each time were found to fix speech problems quickly. The best part? They can be used at home, school, in conjunction with your speech therapist or in any setting.



Speech Buddies tools have been proven effective when used three times per week in 10 to 15 minutes sessions. In addition to the tools themselves, Speech Buddies comes with free online games to make the learning process fun. When you look into the Speech Buddies, you will find tools and options for helping to choose the proper tool for your child. Interactive questions and expert advice are at your fingertips.

So, the bottom line is yes, there are tactile “tools” out there that claim to help with speech therapy. But why try one of these household items on your child when you are not sure of the results? And, you don’t want to take building speaking and language skills lightly, as these set up your child for success in the future.

