



Supporting Children With Unclear Speech

As children learn to speak, it is normal for them to have difficulties producing certain sounds, which can make it harder for them to be understood at times. Speech sounds develop over time, with certain ones being learnt earlier than others. By the age of 8, most children will be able to produce all speech sounds.

Some children may have a speech sound delay or disorder. This means that they find it more difficult to learn to say certain sounds or it may take them longer to learn how to produce certain words. This can make it harder to understand what your child is trying to say.

The following approaches will help support children who have unclear speech.



Play sound games with your child – eye-spy, finding things in the house, school or nursery that begin with a specific sound.



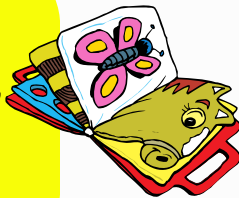
Practise clapping out the syllables in words, for example dog is one clap, table is two claps and ba-na-na three claps.

Try to reduce background noises, such as the TV or radio and environmental distractions, for example people walking past outside the window.

Sit at the same level as your child, so they can clearly see your face. Encourage them to look at your face when you are talking.

Try to speak clearly and not too fast.

For children whose speech is very unintelligible, it may be helpful to have a book with pictures of important words in, so they can point if they need to, for example to toilet, important people, food or drink.



If you are having difficulty understanding what your child is saying, see if they can tell you in another way, for example by:

- showing you what it is
- using actions or gestures
- drawing what it is
- describing it – What is it like? Where would you find it? What is it for?
- using a different word
- telling you the sound the word starts with.



Try to be patient with your child. They are not being 'lazy'. It is very difficult to change the way you speak, so it may take your child a long time to learn a new sound.



If your child makes errors when they are talking, repeat the word back to them, showing them the correct way to say it. Try to use the word a few times afterwards and put a slight emphasis on the sound they found difficult. Do not then ask them to repeat the word as they may not be able to make the required sounds yet, for example:

Child: 'A tat'

Adult: 'Yes it's a cat', 'It's a black cat', 'The cat is drinking'.

