

# Speech Sounds

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*Supporting your child's speech sound development.*

## What helps

- ✓ Repeat the word back correctly without asking your child to copy you. Child: "That's a tat!" You: "Yes, it's a cat! A big fluffy cat." Focus on what they're telling you, not how they say it.
- ✓ Use a mirror so your child can watch your mouth and tongue while you make sounds together.
- ✓ Make the sound visible and slow. Exaggerate slightly so your child notices what your lips or tongue are doing: "Ssssss... snake!" Keep it playful.
- ✓ Build sound awareness into play, e.g. "Ready... sssslide!" or "p-p-p... pop!"
- ✓ Drop in natural models during everyday routines: "Socks... sssocks" at dressing time.
- ✓ Slow your own speech slightly, so sounds are easier to notice.
- ✓ Praise the attempt, not the accuracy: "You tried the /k/ sound! Amazing effort."
- ✓ Choose books and songs with lots of repeated target sounds.

## What to avoid

- ✗ Asking your child to repeat after you. It can feel like a test, and repeating an error can strengthen it.
- ✗ Correcting in a way that sounds like criticism. Instead of "No, say it properly!" try "Yes, a cat! I saw that too."
- ✗ Non-speech oro-motor exercises (blowing, tongue push-ups, cheek puffing). There's no evidence these improve speech sound production, even though they're sometimes advertised or recommended.

*For more on the evidence around oro-motor exercises, see the RCSLT website.*

# Understanding of Language

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*Helping your child understand and follow what's being said to them.*

## What helps

- ✓ Keep instructions short and simple. Instead of "Go get your coat, shoes and bag," try "Get your coat" (pause), "Now your shoes" (pause).
- ✓ Use gestures, visuals or photos alongside your words, e.g. point to the coat, or show a photo of "snack" at mealtimes.
- ✓ Use Makaton signs for key words such as stop, more, finished and toilet.
- ✓ Give your child time to respond. Silently count to five after an instruction before repeating it.
- ✓ Break bigger instructions into small steps, e.g. "Put the toys in the box" (pause), "Now let's get your shoes" (pause), "Time to go!"

## What to avoid

- ✗ Repeating instructions quickly or asking "Did you hear me?". Slowing down gives your child time to process.
- ✗ Giving too much information at once.
- ✗ Giving instructions out of order, e.g. "Before you do X, do Y."

# Using Language (Communicating)

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*Helping your child build vocabulary and put words together to express themselves.*

## What helps

- ✓ Repeat and expand what your child says. Child: "Car!" You: "Yes! A fast blue car!"
- ✓ Offer choices to encourage talking, e.g. "Do you want juice or milk?", holding both up and waiting for a response.
- ✓ Talk about the pictures in books rather than reading every word: "Look! The bear is hiding! What do you think he's doing?"
- ✓ Comment on what you and your child are doing, using short phrases: "I'm so hungry, let's eat", "You're eating a banana."
- ✓ Model functional language in context, e.g. "I want more", "I don't like it", action words, and feelings words (happy, sad, scared, angry).
- ✓ Use your home language if you're a bilingual family. Speaking more than one language does not confuse or delay children, and it supports their cognitive development and connection with family.

## What to avoid

- ✗ Asking your child to say something on demand or repeat after you. This can reduce confidence and pressure them to communicate. It may build imitation skills, but this doesn't transfer to independent, spontaneous communication.

# Social Interaction Skills & Autism

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*Supporting connection and communication for autistic children and those with social interaction needs (early years).*

## What helps

- ✓ Follow your child's lead. Join in with what interests them, even if it's spinning wheels, shredding paper, or lining up toys.
- ✓ Try the Intensive Interaction approach: copy your child's sounds, movements or facial expressions without pressuring them. This builds trust and shows them that interaction can feel safe and fun.
- ✓ Join in with their rhythm. If they flap, flap with them. Step into their world rather than pulling them into yours.
- ✓ Support your child's sensory needs. Many children communicate through movement, sound or behaviour before they use words, e.g. rocking (self-regulation), spinning (sensory seeking), hiding (feeling overwhelmed).
- ✓ Create a predictable environment using visual routines, timers and simple schedules to reduce anxiety.
- ✓ Focus on connection rather than compliance. Interactions that help your child feel safe, seen and heard build the foundation for social connection, emotional development and language growth.

## What to avoid

- ✗ Forcing eye contact. Looking away can help some children think and feel safe.
- ✗ Interrupting repetitive play. It may be helping your child feel calm, focused or happy.
- ✗ Social 'training' methods, e.g. teaching scripts like "Say hello." Focus instead on authentic connection and what feels natural to your child.