



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

SPEAKING CLEARLY

Parents play a key role in the development of their child's speech and language skills. Many parents want to help their child and are not sure exactly what to do. One of the most common questions parents ask speech and language professionals is:

How can I help my child learn to speak clearly?

1. Expect Errors

All children and adults too, make some errors in articulation - how they make speech sounds. In fact, children normally take seven to eight years to learn to say all of our English sounds correctly.

2. Honesty Pays

Be honest when you do not understand what your child says. Admit that you do not understand. Ask the child to tell you again. Or say, "Show me what you are talking about."

Don't pretend that you understand by saying "That's nice" or "Yes, that's right." You won't be fooling anyone! Your child will probably think that you are just not interested. Your child may stop talking to you, become angry or cry.

When you understand part of your child's remark, let the child know. For example, "You are talking about the dog. What did she do?"

3. Be a Good Listener

Listen to what your child is trying to tell you, not how it is said. Ignore your child's errors. Correcting errors, instead of responding to the message, can undermine your child's confidence as a speaker.

To improve, your child must keep talking! If you constantly correct pronunciation errors, your child may begin to speak less and less. As a general rule, never force your child to repeat a remark you have understood. You want talking to be a good experience.

4. Ignore mistakes.

When people laugh at pronunciation errors, your child feels angry and frustrated. Teasing hurts a child's feelings and never improves speech. Ask family members to be kind and ignore your child's mistakes. Don't imitate the child's "baby talk". Use correct speech that your child can imitate.

5. Model Good Speech

When your child makes errors, repeat the child's message correctly. But don't ask the child to repeat after you. Children learn by listening. They need to listen to good speech. For example, your child might say, "I tan't fit dis wid" for "I can't fix this lid." You could repeat and model as follows "You can't fix the lid? Maybe I can fix it." You are providing a model of correct speech for your child to hear and imitate. Speak clearly and slowly.

6. Fight Ear Infections

Good hearing is necessary for the development of normal articulation. Ear infections can cause hearing losses. Children learn language by hearing it. If your child has even mild or temporary hearing loss during the preschool years, speech and language development may be delayed.

Tugging on ears, congestion, runny nose, or turning up the TV volume are signs of a possible ear infection. Children do not always tell you when they have ear problems. Sometimes they don't even run a fever. When you suspect your child has an ear infection or that the child's ears are 'plugged' see your family physician.

Source: Adapted from an article by Elizabeth M. Prather, Ph.D., Parent Articles I, (1988)