

Playing with sounds: Helping young children develop speech skills

The following activities can help your child develop better speech skills. These activities are best done playfully. If your child is not interested, don't force it. Take a break and try again later. Some children may not make the sounds right away. However, with regular play sessions, most children will engage in sound play with you.

- Silly sound play:** Play with sounds such as a “razzberry” sound (vibrating lips), tongue click, cough, sneeze, or snore. Watch for your child’s response—usually a smile or a laugh. As you continue to engage in silly sound play, you will notice your child begin to copy these sounds.
- Copying:** Acknowledge and support your child’s sounds and attempts at words. Children begin to learn about speech sounds through babble. They learn about conversation through simple turn-taking games. When your child makes sounds, playfully copy what they “say.” Young children enjoy being imitated. For example, while banging on a pot, your child might say “ah-ah-ah.” Repeat “ah-ah-ah.” Wait to see if your child will make the sound again. After your child takes several turns repeating sounds back and forth, you can add a new sound that has meaning for the situation. Using the above example, replace “ah” with “bam” or “boom.”
- Join sounds with actions** such as rocking, swinging, and tickling. For example, bounce the child on your knee, saying “buh-buh-buh.” Stop the motion and see if your child says “buh-buh-buh” to ask for more. If the child is rocking in a chair, say “rock, rock.” Make the sounds higher and lower to add interest.
- Singing with actions:** Sing familiar song games using gestures and actions. These could include “Itsy Bitsy Spider,” “So Big,” or “Pat-a-Cake”. Watch for your child to copy you.
- Daily routines:** Use everyday routines like bath time or mealtime to practice talking. These activities occur regularly and your child can expect what will happen next. Routines are great opportunities for introducing new vocabulary concepts such as hungry/thirsty, wet/dry, hot/cold.
- Hide-and-seek:** Hide a puppet or toy in a box, under a towel, or behind a chair. Gradually move the toy into the child’s view, making a quiet vowel sound such as “ahhhhhh”. Then make a little louder sound such as “boo” or “I’m here” as the toy jumps into full view.
- Changing pitch:** Lift the child in the air, saying “up, up, up,” or other sounds, raising your voice higher as you go. As you slowly lower the child, keep speaking, lowering your voice as you go.
- Toys with sounds:** Play with your child using toy cars, trucks, and animals. Connect a sound with each, and repeat them as you play: “puh-puh-puh” for a boat, “toot-toot” for a train, “errrrr” for an airplane. After hearing you, your child may copy you, making sounds specific to each toy. Be sure to include a variety of vowel sounds: uh, oo, ee, eh, oh, a, uh, eye, aw, ih.
- Puppet play:** Use a puppet in a simple “hi” and “bye-bye” game. Let the puppet say “hi” to everyone. Then talk about leaving, and say “bye-bye” as the puppet disappears

- **Everyday sounds:** Point out everyday sounds as they occur, such as telephones, airplanes, cars, and animals. Make a game by copying the sounds after hearing them, and asking your child to do the same.
- **Pictures:** Choose pictures of common objects and group them by beginning sounds, for example, “ball,” “bird,” and “Barney.” Children often learn and can say B, P, and M first, then T and D. Repeat the words as you look at them with your child.
- **Finger play:** Using the hands creatively often stimulates sound-making. Make up your own or try:
 - playing with water, sand, mud.
 - using clay or Play-Doh® .
 - finger painting or messy play with food.
- **Gestures:** Try teaching head nodding (moving head up and down) for “yes” and head shaking (moving head side to side) for “no.” If asking a yes-or-no question, exaggerate your head motion while you model the “yes” or “no” answer. Encourage your child to do the same.
- **Humor:** Children often respond to humor as they learn “yes” and “no.” You can play a “silly” game: point to a picture of a dog and ask, “Is that a horse?” Then shake your head side to side in an exaggerated way and answer with a smile and a long “Nooooo,” as if that were a silly idea.

Other:

Questions?

If you have any questions, please ask your child’s doctor, nurse practitioner, or speech therapist.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our website: www.childrensmn.org/A-Z.