

## **General Strategies to Help a Child with Unclear Speech**

### **React to what the child says; not how clearly they speaks**

Children often do not realise that they are mispronouncing words so correcting them can be confusing. For example, child says 'fis' .....adult says 'Did you say fis?' the child looks puzzled and replies 'No, I said fis not FIS!'

### **Repeat what the child says but give a correct speech model**

If the child says 'I like my tories'. You say 'Yes, stories are fun'. This way you are saying 'Yes I know what you mean but this is how you say it.' You might want to give just the **slightest** emphasis to the sound(s) the child mispronounced.

### **Don't make the child repeat words**

Children need to feel relaxed and confident in order to experiment with sounds and so change their speech patterns. Drawing too much attention to mispronunciations and making children repeat words is not helpful.

### **Reduce background noise**

Reduce background noise as much as possible so children can hear the speech you are modelling clearly.

### **Build self esteem**

If part of the child's conversation is understood, repeat it back. This shows the child that they have been partially successful and may encourage them to tell you more. Use strategies to help anticipate what the child might say. For example, a home-school book in which the parents can record events or weekend activities, or use books, pictures, models etc. These can help if the speech is very unclear because you have some idea of what the child might be trying to communicate. Give praise for the other things the child does well.

### **Don't pretend to understand**

Encourage the use of gesture and mime and ask the child to show you things. Sometimes you just have to admit that you can't understand. Be as reassuring as possible. Change the subject and focus on something positive.

### **Children may be able to articulate a sound but not use it in words**

This is quite normal. A child may articulate 's' but say 'tock' for 'sock'. The child has to understand how to use the sound. This usually develops naturally. The best way to help is to repeat the words correctly so they hear good models. Sometimes speech and language therapy is needed.

### **Attention and listening games**

Attention and listening games are good for children's speech sound development because they help them focus and listen more carefully to speech.