

## ***Speaking like Elmer Fudd: About /l/ and /r/ Errors***

"You siwee wabbit! You wobbled my yucky cawwots! Now I have bad yuck. I wiw get you!" said Elmer Fudd.

It's ok when kindergarten children speak like Elmer Fudd, erring on /l/ and /r/ sounds. Go into any kindergarten classroom and you'll hear a good percentage of young children erring on one or both sounds.

Both of these sounds, labeled as liquid sounds in the world of speech therapy, are quite variant throughout individual speakers and throughout words. Both sounds depend upon what precedes and succeeds their production within words. For example, /l/ in the word glade is produced slightly different from the /l/ in blade because /g/ is produced differently from /b/. Because the tongue is already in a placement in the mouth for the preceding /b/ (lips smacking together while tongue is in front of mouth preparing to produce /l/) and /g/ (tongue humps up in the back of the mouth while tongue slightly back from the front of the mouth to produce the /l/), the /l/ production is slightly different in each word. Vowels preceding and succeeding /l/ and /r/ also affect the production. In other words, the /l/ in "ool" is slightly different from the /l/ in "eel". The same is true for /r/ productions.

Both sounds are produced within the mouth hidden to the eye, thus making it difficult to determine exactly what is happening, especially to very young children. To train young children to first be aware of the sound quality they produce acoustically then secondly to be aware of their tongue position is difficult. Young children are often just not self-aware enough yet to understand the need for proper placement to produce acoustically accurate sounds.

Additionally, both of these sounds are affected by dialects throughout the country. Think of how Bostonians say 'card' - more like 'cod' to others around the states.

Because of all these compounding factors, it makes it very difficult to obtain accurate production of these sounds until much later in childhood for some children. Speech/language pathologists may wait until a child reaches 8 years of age or late second grade before presenting speech therapy to a child who errs on /l/ or /r/. What can you do in the meantime?

- Be patient.
- Always produce a corrected and stressed model back to the child when errors occur.
- Try not to directly correct the child, unless the child seems ok with this. Err on the side of listening to the message that is being presented rather than focusing on the speech errors.