

Making Speech Sounds

The following list of sounds and directions for typical production are basically in developmental sequence, with younger, easier sounds listed first and later developing more difficult sounds toward the end. Because we cannot see our own mouths, share a mirror at face level to show correct production between adult and child. Sometimes for sounds that emit air out of the mouth, such as /b, /p/, /t/, /d/, and /s/, it is helpful to push the air into a light-weight object, such as a feather or tissue, to see the airflow. Make it fun!

Eliciting Correct Production of the /h/ Sound

The /h/ sound is an open-mouthed production with no constriction present. Children should be able to make this sound at a very early age. To help with its production, a piece of tissue, paper, or a feather can be used to blow away from the mouth as the sound is made.

Eliciting Correct Production of the /w/ Sound

The /w/ sound is made by rounding the lips and blowing air through the constriction. The lips may barely touch for this sound, but only barely as the /b/ or /p/ sound may result otherwise.

Eliciting Correct Production of the “y” Sound

The “y” sound is elicited by pulling the lips back in a smile and blowing air through the opened mouth.

Eliciting Correct Production of /b/ and /p/ Sounds

The /b/ and /p/ sounds are made by closing the lips and bursting forth with a blast of air. Both sounds are produced the same way. The only difference is that /p/ is unvoiced, meaning it is a softer sound elicited with less airflow, while the /b/ is voiced, forcing more air through the vocal mechanism and vibrating the vocal chords. Feel the vocal chords vibrate by placing hand gently on the throat, noting the difference while making the two different sounds.

Eliciting Correct Production of /m/ Sound

The /m/ sound is made by placing the lips together and humming. Minimal air should pass through the nasal cavity producing a slight tickling sensation in the nose. /m/ is a voiced sound so that the vocal chords will vibrate slightly.

Eliciting Correct Production of /n/ and /ng/ Sounds

The /n/ sound is made by placing the tongue tip behind the top front teeth and passing a continuous stream of air over the tongue while simultaneously allowing some air to pass through the nasal cavity. It may tickle.

The /ng/ sound is made by cupping the tongue near the roof of the mouth and passing air over the tongue. Again a bit of air is passed up into the nasal cavity. The tongue humps up in the back to complete the /ng/ sound.

Eliciting Correct Production of /t/ and /d/ Sounds

The /t/ and /d/ sounds are made by tapping the tongue tip just behind the top front teeth. The /t/ sound is unvoiced, meaning the vocal chords do not vibrate. The /d/ is voiced made by forcing more air through the vocal chords to make them vibrate. Gently hold a hand over the throat area to note the difference between /t/ and /d/.

Eliciting Correct Production of /k/ and /g/ Sounds

The /k/ and /g/ sounds are made by humping the tongue up in the back of the mouth. Both sounds are produced the same way. The /g/ sound is made by pushing more air through the constriction so that the vocal chords vibrate. /g/ is voiced, while /k/ is unvoiced. Feel the throat while producing the two different sounds.

Children often substitute /t/ for /k/ sound and /d/ for /g/ sound, which means the tip of the tongue is tapping the roof of the mouth just behind the top front teeth. In order to help a child make these sounds correctly, hold the tongue tip down in the front of the mouth. Either have the child do this with a finger or try using a popsicle stick. In holding this part of the tongue down, it should hump up in the back. Adjust the finger or stick to keep the tongue down in front, but beware of the gag reflex. Interestingly, sometimes lying on the back helps to elicit this sound. Try it!

Eliciting Correct Production of /s/ and /z/ Sounds

The /s/ and /z/ sounds are made by parting the lips, gently clenching the teeth and passing air through the constriction. The tongue basically curls behind the teeth. The /s/ sound is unvoiced, while the /z/ sound is voiced - passing more air through the constriction to vibrate the vocal chords. Feel the throat while producing the two different sounds.

Sometimes children make a lisping /s/ by sticking the tongue past the teeth. By giving the cue to close the teeth together, this may be prevented.

Eliciting Correct Production of /f/ and /v/ Sounds

The /f/ and /v/ sounds are made by biting the lower lip and pushing air through this constriction. Both sounds are produced the same way. The /v/ sound is made by pushing more air through the constriction so that the vocal chords vibrate. /v/ is voiced, while /f/ is unvoiced. Feel the throat while producing the two different sounds. A typical substitution for these sounds is /p/ for /f/ and /b/ for /v/. The cue to “bite your lip” should elicit the sounds correctly.

Eliciting Correct Production of the “sh” Sound

The “sh” sound is produced by rounding the lips and blowing air through the constriction. It is sometimes helpful to model the sound while giving the 'hush' sign (finger on rounded lips with air flow emitted).

Eliciting Correct Production of the “th” Sound

The “th” sound is produced by placing the tongue between the upper and lower teeth, slightly sticking out of the space. Air is passed over the tongue to produce the sound. There is an unvoiced “th” as in “bath” and a voiced “th” as in “bathe.” This is a fun sound because children are asked to “stick out your tongue!”

Eliciting Correct Production of the // Sound

The // sound is widely varied amongst speakers. It is dependent on what precedes or succeeds it in a word production. It is produced by placing the tongue tip on the roof just behind the top front teeth, though some people produce the sound accurately with a protruding tongue tip. A stream of air is passed through the resulting constriction.

Eliciting Correct Production of the /r/ Sound

The /r/ sound is widely varied amongst speakers. It is dependent on what precedes or succeeds it in a word production. The tongue tip is usually curled toward the roof of the mouth to make this sound.

Of special note about learning to produce accurate /r/. Research has found that the tongue has the most rapid rate of growth between the ages of 5.5 - 7.5 years. While producing /r/, we rely totally on kinesthetic and proprioceptive feedback (i.e. we need to rely on feel vs. sight) because the tongue makes no contact anywhere in the mouth to produce /r/. During this rapid growth time, the feedback received may literally change from week to week. Therefore this makes it a more difficult sound to teach for correction at earlier ages.

Eliciting Correct Production of Blends

Breaking apart the blend into its individual components is helpful. For example, if the difficulty is with “st” blend, first produce “s”, then add “t” and the rest of a word. Try “s-s-s-t-t-t-op”. If the difficulty is with “gr” blend, first produce “g-r-r-r-eeen”. Because “g” is made quickly, move through it quickly, then elongate on the “r” sound. The goal is to gradually decrease the space between the sounds until they can be made in rapid succession.

Keep in mind that the mouth needs to move very rapidly from one sound to the next for these blends - it's a lot of work to ask a young child to make blends when they are not physically ready. Be patient.