

CONFIDENCE COMES WITH CLEAR SPEECH

The ability to speak clearly in front of a group is a skill that is fast becoming one of life's basic skills.

It is a skill that is used daily; whether it be at school talking in front of the class, at work participating in a group discussion or case conference or at home talking around the dinner table. There is nothing more frustrating than when the person speaking is too quiet to be heard or speaking indistinctly so they can't be understood. Sometimes children and adults alike can be very aware that they can't pronounce a particular sound or sounds so they try and disguise their difficulty by speaking softly and/or by lowering their head when they speak. All this does unfortunately is make it even harder for the listener.

As parents, we are aware that some sounds are harder to say than others and all children develop at their own rate but very often we can become so used to the way our children speak that we don't even notice that they are mispronouncing some sounds.

However, as more and more assessment tasks at school are being delivered in an oral format it has become increasingly important that, not only must our children be able to speak clearly, they must be confident speakers as well.

Nothing can boost a child's confidence further than knowing that they can pronounce all sounds and are a clear speaker. Likewise a child who is aware that they are having difficulties saying certain sounds can lack confidence when speaking.

The sounds that often develop a little later, between the ages of 5-7 years, are the s, z, r, v and th sounds. Many well-intentioned friends and family members may even tell you not to worry about your child mispronouncing some of these sounds as they are "sure to grow out of it"

However, in many cases, children simply do not 'grow out of' these speech errors and are still talking about 'a thilly wed feaver' (a silly red feather) or even saying things like 'fanks' (thanks) and 'brover' (brother) when they are 8 years or even older. Children making these errors may be singled out by other children as sounding 'different' which can contribute to their lack of confidence around speaking activities.

The tip to remember is that ALL children should be pronouncing ALL sounds correctly by 7 years of age. If they are not, then they may need an assessment and then speech therapy to teach them initially how to say the sound/s correctly and then assistance with generalising the new sound into everyday speaking activities.

Another complicating factor contributing to unclear speech can be observed in children or teenagers whose speech deteriorates the longer they talk or if they increase their speed of talking. It can sound as though all the words are running together and it sounds like one long slurred word which is very difficult to

understand. These children can have difficulties coordinating the muscles of the tongue, lips and face to move in sequence as they want them to. They may also find it difficult to rapidly sequence sounds together accurately in order to form the words in the sentence so that they sound clear and distinct. Children with these difficulties need to learn to:

- Speak at a slightly slower rate
- Speak with a wider mouth opening
- Move the muscles of their mouth more
- 'Over pronounce' all the sounds in the word particularly the sounds at the end of the word

So the best way to encourage your child to speak clearly is:

- Always ask that your child looks at your face when he/she is speaking to you
- Always repeat back the word the child has mispronounced, saying it correctly, slightly emphasizing the sound you want them to notice
- Encourage your child to take his time talking and not to rush.

Look at the table below to see if your child is pronouncing the sounds correctly that he/she should be for his/her age.

AGE	SOUNDS ACQUIRED
3 years	b, p, m, w, h, ng, n, t, d, g, y
3 1/2 years	k and f
4 years	l, sh and ch
4 1/2 years	s, z and j
5 years	r
6 years	v
7 years	th

If your child is older than the age specified and is still mispronouncing the sound then it could be a good idea to have your child assessed. If you have any questions please contact Tyquin Group on (07) 33998028.