

# the **early years** toolkit

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## Helping children with unclear speech

### **It is important to respond to what the child says, not how clearly they speak**

Children often do not realise they are mispronouncing words so correcting them can be confusing. For example, if the child says "fis" and the adult says "Did you say fis?" the child may look puzzled and reply "No. I said fis, not FIS"!!

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

If the child says "I like tories at cool", you could say "Yes, stories at school are fun." This way you are saying "Yes I know what you mean but this is how you say it." You may want to give just the slightest emphasis to the sound(s) the child has mispronounced.

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

Drawing too much attention to mispronunciations is not helpful.

### **Build self esteem**

If part of the child's conversation is understood, repeat it back. This shows them 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 by using 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 child's speech is very unclear because you have some idea of what they might be trying to communicate. Give praise for other things the child does well.

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

Try:

- asking questions
- saying "show me ......." and encouraging the use of gesture and mime as well as the child taking you to things.

Sometimes you just have to admit that you can't understand. Be as reassuring as possible.

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

This is quite normal. A child may be able to make the "s" sound on their own but then say "tock" for "sock". The best way to help is to repeat the words correctly so they hear good models. Sometimes speech and language therapy is needed.