

Tips for Stimulating Your Baby's Early Speech Sound Development

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Before your child's palate repair it will be difficult for them to learn to say sounds that require air (pressure) to build up in their mouth, like "p", "b" and "d". The main goal before the palate repair is to help your baby learn to speak by using their lips and tongue to create sounds. We want to encourage the baby to use sounds that they can be most successful at, such as those that do not require their palate to work yet, such as "m, n, w, "y"" and "h". Most babies with cleft palate do not say sounds like "p" or "b" before their palate surgery, but we still want them to hear those sounds frequently too, as they are still learning about those sounds and will eventually begin to use them after their palate surgery.

We do not want to encourage the baby to only learn to use their throat to make sounds (such as grunts or similar sound called "glottal stops"). We hope to avoid having the baby use too many rough sounds like grunts, truck noises or gruff animal noises. It's perfectly normal for all babies to use some throat sounds and noises, especially at early ages; however, some children with cleft palate may get into a habit of using these sounds too much as they get older, and this can make it harder for them to learn new sounds. If you hear your child making a lot of these grunts or throat sounds, we recommend that you just ignore it and instead, say the correct pronunciation or a different sound back at your child. For example, if your child says "uh" for "truck", you can just say "yes, truck! "beep-beep". Or, if your child says "'aeh-ee" for "daddy", you should just say "yes, daddy" back at them, instead of mimicking the incorrect production. Whenever your child speaks, you should praise them for using their words, or even more specifically, their lips or tongue, to continue to encourage normal speech development.

On the back of this handout, there are a few examples of some words you can emphasize and practice with your baby. When you say these, feel free to exaggerate how you use your lips or tongue to start the word. Keep in mind:

- Notice that the target sounds are all at the beginning of the words. That's because it's common for infants and toddlers to make mistakes or even leave off the later sounds of words when they are first learning to talk. In addition, by working on the first sounds of words, research suggests that this might help your child avoid continued use of those throaty sounds (the glottal stops) that they might have used in the past.
- Try to encourage these words during your child's daily routine (For example, you can practice "bubble" during bathtime, or "yummy" during meals).
- It's perfectly normal for a baby to not imitate your words and sounds every time, but most babies will repeat sounds back at you at least occasionally, and more often as they approach 12-15 months of age.

- After the palate repair surgery, you should shift to increased practice of the P, B, D, and T words on this list and give your child more specific praise (e.g., for “P” you can say “good job using your lips!”).

PRACTICE WORDS

M: More, Mama/Mom, Me, Mine, Moo, Meow

N: No-No, Nana, Nice, Num-Num, Nose, Night-Night, Neigh (horse sound)

H: Hi, Hop, Hot, Happy, Hug, Here, Hey, Hat, Head

W: Whoa, Wow, Whee, Want, Wawa/water, Whoops, Wash

Y: Yeah, Yea, Yes, Yipee, Yummy/Yum-Yum, You

B: Bye, Ball, Boo, Bowl, Boo-Boo, Bottle, Baby, Bib, Bite, Beep, Bubble, Book, Baa-Baa, Bath

P: Pop, Pooh, Papa, Peek/Peek-a-Boo, Puppy

D: Dada, Done, Down, Diaper, Duck

T: Two, Toy, Teeth

Here are some ideas for how to work these words into your child’s daily routine.

- **Bubbles:** When playing with bubbles you can emphasize the “p” and “b” in the words “bubble” and “pop”. Have your child request more by saying “mmm” or “more.”
- **Reading books:** When reading books, pick ones with just a few pictures on the page and point out the pictures with “p, b, m, and “n” and model the sounds/words for your baby.
- **Snack time:** Give just one piece or part of the snack at a time to create opportunities for your child to request “more”. During snack time, try to make situations your child has to gesture/point, sign or attempt to say the word “more” or “please.” Then you can say “yummy” when they take a bite too! Remember to model the words for your child and reward even the simplest attempts they make towards the goal.
- **Blocks:** This is a great activity to practice “p” and “b”. Remember to not give out all the blocks at one time, and instead have your child request them one at a time by attempting to gesture/point, sign or say “more” or “please.” You can model words such as “blocks, blue, build, pile, please, put, down, up, boom” and so forth during playtime. Hold the block by your mouth when you model the words so your child looks at your face when you say the sounds.
- **Farm Animals:** Modeling animal sounds like “baa”, “moo”, “meow”, “neigh” and “woof” while playing with the animals is a great way to keep your child interested in the activity and to encourage imitation.
- **Bed and bath time:** This is a good time to emphasize words like “bed, bath, brush, nap, sleep, pillow, blanket, papa, mama, bubble”