

### Helping Children Learn to Speak Clearly

Parents and teachers play a very important role in the development of a child's speech and language skills. Here are a few tips that will assist you in helping children speak more clearly:

#### 1. Expect errors.

- It takes up to seven or eight years to learn all of the speech sounds in English. Expect mistakes.
- Ask other children to avoid teasing or laughing at pronunciation errors, as this can be upsetting and may discourage the child from speaking.
- Admit when you don't understand. Ask the child to tell you again or show you.
- **General rule:** If you understood the message, don't force the child to repeat something that was mispronounced. Children often get frustrated and tell you "I already said that."

#### 2. Be a good listener.

- Pay attention to the child's gestures, eye movements and body language to see what the child is interested in...and talking about.
- Listen to **what** the child is trying to tell you, not **how** it is said, since constantly correcting errors can affect a child's self-esteem and can lead to reduced talking.
- Acknowledge that you heard the child by repeating the message naturally in conversation. For example, "You want some more paper? Here's some paper."

#### 3. Avoid direct correction.

- Try to avoid directly pointing out a word or a sound that is in error.
- Pay attention to the sounds that are hard for the child and emphasize them in your own speech.
- Even if you only understood one word that the child said, try to avoid "pardon" or "what" that suggest they start over and say it all again. Instead, repeat the word you understood and help to frame the "story" (e.g. "Doggie. You saw a doggie?" or "Tell me about the doggie.")

#### 4. Model correct speech.

- Modeling means that you respond to the child by using your own words, but still using your child's topic.
- When you recognize a word that the child said (even if it is an error), repeat the word or phrase more slowly and emphasize the word or error sound by saying it a little louder, a little slower and by stretching it out (e.g., child says : 'tocks', parents says 'ssssssocks').
- Don't ask the child to repeat after you. They will learn simply by listening to correct speech.
- Try to have the child's attention when you are talking to each other so that he can **see** and **hear** how the sounds are made.

#### 5. Use opportunities for indirect teaching.

- Comment on sounds in words without asking the child to say them.
- Example: "That's Suzie. Her name starts with the **s-s-s-s** snake sound."