General information

Why is speech development important?
If speech difficulties persist they may have an impact on other aspects of your child’s life, in particular their ability to read and spell.

What causes speech problems?
In most cases, the exact cause of developmental speech problems in children is unknown. Developing and producing speech requires complex co-ordination, precise timing, and nerve and muscle control. Speech development is a mixture of nature and nurture. Speech problems may occur as a result of hearing difficulties or due to birth defects (e.g. cleft palate).

What is the prognosis?
Each child’s progress will vary depending on several factors, including the type of speech problem, the severity of the speech difficulties and environmental factors. Progress can be maximised by practicing speech tasks regularly and encouraging speech and language development.

Suggested resources

Reference

Websites
Please talk to your Speech Pathology student about great websites and resources to access for further information.

UQ Health & Rehabilitation Clinics
Speech Pathology Clinic

Phone: 07 3365 2232
Email: healthclinics@uq.edu.au
Web: www.uq.edu.au/healthclinics
What is ... ?

Speech
Involves the pronunciation of sounds in words.

Articulation
The way sounds, syllables and words are formed when the tongue, jaw, teeth, lips and palate change the air stream coming from the voice box.

Speech delay
When speech develops at a slower than average rate but follows the usual pattern of speech development of other children (eg “tup” for “cup”).

Speech disorder
Involves using unusual, non-developmental sound patterns and rules of speech (eg “up” for “cup”).

What is a lisp?
Difficulty achieving the correct tongue when producing “s” and “z” sounds (tongue goes out between teeth).

Speech milestones
Children often develop speech at different rates. However, there is a general pattern to a child’s speech development.

Use the following as a general guide as to what age children will attempt different sounds:

Between birth and four years:
- p  d
- b  k
- m  g
- n  f
- w  s
- h  z
- t  y

After four years:
- l  sh
- ch  j
- v  r
- th

By eight years children can generally say all of the sounds correctly.

Many children exhibit some common speech errors during early childhood.
These errors often appear as replacing the correct sound with incorrect sounds (eg “tat” for “cat”, “wabbit” for “rabbit” and “free” for “three”).

Tips for parents

- Monitor your child for ear infections as speech development depends on listening to others
- Avoid finishing your child’s sentences
- Communicate with your child during daily activities and play, starting during infancy - read books, talk, sing songs and encourage imitations of sounds and gestures
- Use everyday situations to reinforce your child’s speech and language. In other words, talk your way through the day
- If you are asking your child to say a specific sound, show him/her how to make it and talk about what you are doing with your tongue and lips
- Give specific feedback/praise about what your child has said
- If you are having difficulty understanding what your child is saying, do not pretend that you understand. Try asking your child for additional information about the item by using words or pointing.

Expect your child to make some mistakes as learning to say all speech sounds accurately takes time.