

# Tips for Teaching Articulation



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Articulation therapy is very structured. When you are teaching a child to produce a difficult sound, it is important to first teach the child the characteristics of the sound (ie sound, look, and feel of the sound) by modeling, pictures, and associations (/t/ is the “tick tock” sound while swinging the arm like a clock). Once the child has established the sound, look, and feel for each target sound, the child can practice producing the sounds up a ladder of complexity (ie isolation, syllable, word, sentence, story, and conversation levels). The child should master the sound at each level in order to move onto the next level. Here is a simple description of each level:

**1 Isolation Level:** At this level, the child is practicing the sound, look, and feel of the target sound as it stands alone. For example, for the /f/ sound the child would practice softly biting his bottom lip with his top front teeth and blowing a continuous stream of air with his voice “turned off” (“ffffffffffffff”). It would not sound like “fa” or “ef”, but just a continuous stream of the /f/ sound.

**2 Syllable Level:** At this level, the child is adding a vowel sound after the target sound (fee, fi, fo, fa, foo, etc), before the target sound (ef, if, uf, af, oof, eef, etc), or on either side of the target sound (ifi, eefee, oofoo, afa, etc). This helps the child practice making the sound at the beginning, middle, and end of words.

**3 Word Level:** At this level, the child uses word lists in order to practice the sound in real words. It is best to start with simple one-syllable words and move towards two to three syllable words. He should practice the sounds at the beginning (initial), middle (medial), and ending (final) position of words. One of these positions might be easier for the child than another. If that is the case, start by practicing the sound in the position (initial, medial, or final) that is the easiest and work towards practice in the position (initial, medial, or final) that is the most difficult. If the child is unable to correctly produce the sound in words, go back to practicing the sound in isolation, and then add the vowels surrounding the target sound in the word. For example, if the child is having trouble with the word “seek” re-establish the sound, look, and feel of “ssssss”, then move onto practicing “see”, then move back to the word “seek.”.

**4 Sentence Level:** At this level, the child practices the target sound in sentences, once again at the beginning (initial), middle (medial), and ending (final) position of words. You can start with simple carrier phrases, such as “I see \_\_\_\_\_” filling in the blank with a target word. The child should then work towards producing longer sentences with more than one word including the target sound (ie “Sue saw the sun”). If the child starts misarticulating the sounds at this level, have the child practice the target words before using them in the sentence.

**5 Story Level:** At this level, the child should have mastered the target sound at the sentence level. Now it is time to practice the sound while reading or retelling a story. When first starting this level, I find it helpful to identify and practice the target words before reading the whole story. I also sometimes underline or highlight those words and gradually fade that prompt as they become more proficient. You can do this same kind of thing if the child is retelling a story by practicing the target words or providing pictures/lists of the target words before beginning the retell.

**6 Conversation Level:** This level should begin as structured conversation, where you may be talking about a picture or a topic that would lend itself to the target sound (ie Talk about the summer to elicit the /s/ sound such as summer, sunny, sand, sandals, swim, etc). The child should work towards correctly using the sound in casual conversation over a variety of topics, in a variety of settings, with a variety of people. As always, if the child is struggling with the sound in conversation, go back to practicing the sound at the story level. Also, if the child is struggling at the conversation level, I find it helpful to agree upon a visual cue, such as touching your mouth, that you can give the child if he is forgetting his target sound.

#### References for “Tips for Teaching”

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