

Speech Goals at Home: Ideas for Parents

by Joey Lynn Resciniti

My daughter, Julia, was diagnosed at age 3 with a moderate sensorineural hearing loss. Finding a reason for her speech delay did ease some of my worry. But even after she was fitted with hearing aids, her days needed to be filled with language-rich experiences. This was a task I felt ill-equipped to handle.



Helping your child advance toward speech goals at home is difficult, especially for parents like me who don't have the skills of a trained speech-language pathologist, auditory-verbal therapist or certified teacher of the deaf. Still, parents remain a key component in the effort to achieve listening and spoken language for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing. The following tips are some of the most important ways parents can affect a positive outcome for their child's speech development and are based on advice I used from the professionals we counted on during Julia's spoken language development.

What Do You Talk About?

In the beginning, all conversations with your child are one-sided. For me, it was difficult to think of what to say. I never thought of myself as a big talker and knowing that I needed to talk so she could talk caused me a great deal of anxiety. I can remember sitting on the playroom floor with a set of circus-themed, Fisher Price Peek-A-Blocks, begging myself to think of something to say. Every moment of silence felt heavy with failure as I tried to force myself to talk about something. My simple utterances seemed useless and wearing. I felt exhausted repeating, "up, up, up" every time she climbed something only to say, "down, down, down" the other side. Thankfully, the [John Tracy Clinic](#) offers a free correspondence class that provides activities and games that help parents come up with things to say to their child. The games provide examples of conversations to carry on with your child to help expand their attempts at speech. It served a dual purpose for me to know that I wasn't alone in struggling with this concept. Feeling like you're talking to yourself can be rough!

Find Comfort in Your Personal Technique



To ensure success in these critical early years, it is important to find a comfortable technique that works for you and your child. If you feel self-conscious or silly about the way you are talking to your child, you may be less inclined to keep doing it. Keep trying different approaches if you find yourself frequently at a loss for words.

Your personal strategy can range from casual interactions to highly planned and regimented activities. I once attended a workshop where a young mother displayed the props she crafted for her toddler's bedtime stories. There were finger plays and fairy tales all depicted on cereal boxes and Popsicle sticks. For me, I found it was easy to give instructions about cooking and other household tasks with Julia on my hip, which also helped remind me what to do. Keep in mind that nothing is too boring or mundane to bring to your child's attention; this is also your time to share your own observations about the world.

Adjust Daily Practice

Setting aside fifteen minutes a day for dedicated practice has worked for Julia, but the activities we used needed to vary. There was a phase when she'd work on pasting a "bitey sound" collage for an hour. This was quickly followed by a phase of blatant refusal to look at anything resembling a worksheet. She's not always interested in "working," but can be cajoled into practicing sounds by showing a baby doll the proper way to say something. It is important to adjust for your child's personality and avoid letting yourself or your child get frustrated by an activity that is too forced.

Repetition of Target Words and Sounds

For the periods of time when organized activities were rejected, Julia's hearing teacher provided me with a list of books, words and songs featuring our target sound. Amanda Wysocki, M.Ed., a teacher of the deaf, told me, "You have to remember her brain has only been exposed to this sound correctly for less than a year. A child with typical hearing has heard it for three years. It will take a while for her brain to form the connections needed to say it herself." That advice made our work at home easier.

For example, our efforts on the /f/ sound had been futile. Julia just would not say the sound. I was frustrated and she was becoming disinterested, so I stopped trying to get her to say it and found every way I could to describe something with an f-sound. Instead of pretty, I referred to everything as fancy: "That's a fancy dress" or "What a fancy dance you're doing!"

Her response was fantastic. Just before I thought I might lose my mind from all these f-words, she began imitating me. Months later, the sound was solid and we moved on to a new list of books and songs. Currently, everything is "special."

Maintain Consistent and Appropriate Amplification

Through it all, your child must wear his or her hearing aids or cochlear implant sound processors during all waking hours. "Sometimes, parents of children with mild to moderate hearing losses are not as strict with wearing hearing aids. That can really hurt their child's ability to hear all of the sounds of speech, especially the high-frequency consonants," says Michelle Parfitt, M.A., CCC-SLP, the early intervention coordinator for Pittsburgh's DePaul School for Hearing and Speech. Devices should be checked daily so that your child hears everything, every day.



Parents may be stressed to know that the most opportunities for your child's speech development happen at home. But with patience, perseverance, creativity and consistent amplification, you will find what everyday activities your child will respond to and feel confident in your contribution to the child's speech and language development. Someday soon you'll join me in my next challenge, getting her to be quiet!

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<http://www.listeningandspokenlanguage.org/Document.aspx?id=330>

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