

Tips for Setting up Successful Speech Practice Sessions

First, ensure you have a safe, trusting relationship with the child. If needed, work on this before working on the speech practice sessions. Investment early on in this relationship and in maintaining the relationship will increase the effectiveness of speech practice sessions.

Pick a time when you know you are able to focus only on the speech practice. Our minds tend to wander off into thinking ahead or making plans. Work on staying present in the moment; the aim is not to prevent your attention from wandering, but rather to bring your attention back to the present each time this happens.

Choose a time and space where you can avoid distractions. You may want to have a rule that you both leave mobile phones/ipads/laptops in a different room, turn off the radio or TV and ask other people not to interrupt if possible.

Give the child some notice that you will be starting the session, such as a 'count down' to the session starting. This will help the child to feel a sense of control and predictability.

Be confident (or act as if you are confident) that the child will cooperate with the session, giving a sense of containment and safety.

Try to stick to a predictable routine or structure to the sessions.

Keep speech practice sessions positive and fun for the child. Where possible, ignore silly or disruptive behaviour, to avoid inadvertently rewarding this behaviour so that attention is focused on the positive aspects of the session.

You can use rewards to encourage more of the behaviour you want to see, such as remaining seated for a certain length of time or joining the session when asked. If the child does not cooperate, let them know, clearly and calmly, that they have not earned the reward today for staying in their seat or coming to the session but there will be another chance to cooperate and earn a reward, for example, after lunch or tomorrow (see Resource Sheet 'Tips for using rewards in speech practice sessions').

Reward yourselves at the end of the session, for example with an enjoyable shared activity.