

Resource Sheet: The Use of Feedback in Generalization of Speech: Practical Advice

Initial stages of therapy

Feedback will need to be immediate and specific so that the child knows what is correct/incorrect about their sounds. Positive praise often works better than correction (though both are necessary at times).

Whether at sentence or conversational level, informing the child before speech practice that you are going to be listening for their 'good sounds' can help tune them into 'speech mode' and set them up for success, allowing more opportunities for positive feedback.

Examples of feedback include:

- "I saw your teeth on your lip when you said /f/!"
- "You said house with your long sound."
- "Excellent! Your tongue was at the back of your mouth for that sound, you didn't use your /t/ sound at the front."

Useful tips

- Encouraging the child to feel their voice box for the voiced/voiceless distinction between sounds can be beneficial.
- Holding up a target sound card while the child is talking can help them to remember to use their sound/s.
- Mirror work can help the child to see visual sounds as they produce them.
- The use of Cued Articulation, (Passy, 1993) provides a visual prompt to reinforce sounds.

In cases where the child does make an error, it is important to praise their effort while providing information on how they can improve their accuracy. For example:

"That was a really good try, but I think your tongue was at the back, let's try one with your tongue at the front!"

Some children may dislike the feeling of being 'corrected', even when done in a sensitive way. These approaches may help:

- Use of 'Deferred Responsibility' (as described in Phippen et al., 2013) is a great way to remove 'blame' from the child for their error. For example, you could say, "I think your tongue jumped at the back of your mouth then, shall we tell the front part of your tongue that it needs to move?"
- Parents in particular often report that their child becomes annoyed when they give feedback on their errors. Using a toy such as a puppet or action figure can substitute the parent in indicating when an error is made. For example, the toy can make a movement or noise when errors are heard, or the adult may pretend that the toy is unable to see the child's tongue. Similarly, to increase interest, the toy rather than the adult can 'listen' for the child's correct sounds.
- Older children can be more involved in discussions to help them understand the purpose of somebody commenting on their speech. They are more likely to agree to receiving feedback if they are included in the process.

Generalization in conversation

There will be more opportunities for children to attempt sounds (and make errors!) during conversational speech. Preparing the child in advance to think about their sounds and use their 'good talking' is important.

Using correct sounds in conversation can be tiring and effortful, particularly at first. Allocating set 'talking times' (gradually extending the length of time that the child is required to use their good sounds) can be beneficial. Setting a timer can also be useful so the child is aware of how long they need to remain focused.

It may be useful to point out how many times the sound was said correctly, for example:

"You said your sound 5 times in that sentence, you said, this morning we sat outside for science – that was excellent talking!"

Pointing out that more good sounds were used than errors can boost confidence, such as:

"I heard 4 lovely /s/ sounds then, you only forgot your sound when you said **S**aturday!"

Encouraging reflection and self-correction

As children become more responsive to feedback and their speech begins to improve, we need to work towards encouraging reflection and self-correction.

Asking the child a question can help them to reflect on their production, whether accurate or incorrect. Examples include:

"Did you use your good /p/ sound then?"

"Well done, that was right, and where was your tongue when you made that sound?"

"How many times did you use your good sound in that sentence? Say it again and have a think"

Video recording the child and encouraging them to watch it back, rating or counting their good sounds/errors can be a very effective way of encouraging self-monitoring skills.

There are stages involved in self-correction of errors:

Initially the child may need to copy the word after an adult.

As time goes on the child may be able to:

- say a word correctly when given a clue, e.g., adult says "use your front sound"
- say the word correctly if given a querying look/questioned
- correct their own error without any help from an adult

At this point it may be useful to allow a delay to see if the child will correct their own errors. As they do this, it is important that they receive praise. For example:

"Good job! You fixed your sound all by yourself. . ."

Reducing the frequency of feedback is also important to promote self-evaluation, but you may need to tell the child in advance that this is what you are going to do.

Involvement of people in the child's environment

As clinicians, it is important to equip and empower parents/carers, other family members and teachers with skills and knowledge to support the child. These include being able to identify correct sounds and errors and giving accurate feedback. This is a deceptively hard skill to learn, and discussion about the process is helpful. Without the input of people in the child's environment, and continued practice, generalization of sounds will be extremely difficult.

- As parents/carers or teaching staff observe therapy activities, model and discuss how and why feedback is given to the child.
- Gradually include them in therapy tasks, e.g., asking them to keep a tally of the child's correct sounds and errors that they hear.
- Build up to them providing the feedback to the child. Not only will this allow them to practise the skill of providing feedback, but it will also de-sensitize the child to hearing someone else commenting on their speech.
- Video recording parents/carers /teaching staff giving feedback to their child during conversation and watching it back, allows them to observe how well they are providing feedback and how the child responds to this. More importantly, this equips them to use this skill at home or in school.

For further ideas see Chapter 12 'Therapy for Generalization' and Chapter 17 'Generalization Workbook'.