



Sound Start

Lambton County Preschool Speech & Language Program

What To Do When You Don't Understand A Child's Speech



Ask for a Replay

Ask the child to say their message again. The second time around, more of the message may become clearer. Do not ask for more than two replays, because the child may become frustrated.

"I didn't quite get what you said. Could you try it again?"



Ask for a Demonstration

Ask the child to show you what she is talking about.

"Can you help me by showing me what you want?"



Take the Blame

It's important that the child doesn't feel that it is his fault that he is difficult to understand. Put the blame for lack of understanding on your ears rather than on the child's speech.

"Can you try again? My ears weren't working."



Identify at Least One Word

This lets them know that they haven't failed at their entire message. This will confirm for the child that you have understood some of her message and this can lead to more specific questions about the rest of the message.

"'Cat', you are talking about a 'cat.' Did you see one on the way home from school?"



Recognize and Reinforce Every Attempt to Speak

The child must understand that he is important and what he has to say is important.

"I know you are trying to tell me something and I really want to know what it is, but I'm not quite getting it right now. Can we try again later?"



Avoid Direct Correction

Try not to draw attention to a word that is not said clearly by saying, "That's not right, say _____." This puts too much pressure on children and may cause them to stop trying or to not want to talk. Respond to what the child has said, not how clearly the words came out.

If the child says, "I want tatter (cracker) peeze (please)," you might say to the child: "You want a **cracker**. What kind of **cracker** do you want?"



Repeat and Model

When the child says something that is unclear, but that you recognize, repeat the word(s) or phrase slowly and place emphasis on the word(s) she said incorrectly.

If the child says, "I want a too-ee," you might say to the child, "Oh, you'd like a **c-oo-kie**."



Play with Sounds

Children learn speech by imitating the sounds and words they hear others say. To encourage the correct production of a variety of sounds, you can play sound games with the child.

"What does the _____ (animal name) say?" [f-f-f for an angry cat, he-haw for a donkey, caw-caw for a crow, etc.]

"I have something that makes _____ sound (e.g. airplane, truck, car, phone, bee, etc).