

ERRORS OF SPEECH

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. R. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene)

FLUENCY in a speaker is universally admired. As he links his words into telling, well-phrased sentences, he builds up self-confidence and, provided his subject matter is able, holds and carries his audience with him. On the other hand, the tongue-tied person, struggling with words for expression of his thought, makes us awkward and unhappy on his behalf. He fails to grip his audience, loses self-confidence and develops an inferiority complex. That adds to his troubles and embarrasses him next time he attempts a speech.

Lack of fluency in speech, speech difficulties and disorders, usually start before parents realise it, in infancy or toddler days. They are preventable if parents are watchful and help speech development. Speech is a matter of copying. Adult speech develops through imitation of sound from infancy onwards. The baby cries when hungry or frightened or uneasy physically. Mother can't differentiate between these cries for the first few weeks. Soon expression creeps in. Mother now distinguishes the cry of hunger, the burble or gurgling noise of satisfaction following feeds. These are involuntary sounds. The parents don't go round crying and gurgling. But as the months go by baby picks up and repeats single words used by his parents. He tries to imitate these words.

The shaping of sounds is a complicated process. Nerve messages have to work fast to initiate the acquired movements of muscles, jaws, and tongue. Baby can't achieve the correct co-ordination quickly. Grown-ups have learnt through years of practice. If mother speaks too rapidly, the child tries to imitate, but can't do it in the time allowed. The result is imperfect or delayed speech. Clear, slow, distinct speech is needed in front of baby. Any errors beginning in infancy and toddler times are difficult to eradicate later. Take lisping, or failure to pronounce R correctly! When a speech peculiarity develops, the child is not to be corrected or scolded. Distinct speech is required from all others in the home, and the introduction of some game. The child who can't sound his R's should play with his mother or father a game of purring like a pussy cat. The child will enjoy the game and gradually the difficulty will disappear.

Don't Nag!

The thing to avoid is direct correction. This centres attention on the defect, and makes the child self-conscious about speech. You don't draw the attention of a stammering child to the stammer. Often a stammer has its origin in a parent's direct correction of speech errors. For example—when the first teeth are being lost and slowly replaced by second teeth, the many gaps in the dentition

make accurate speech a matter of care. Blurring and slovenly sounds are common. Constant nagging about such errors at this time may cause stammering.

Parents! Speak clearly in your home. Speak slowly and distinctly in baby's hearing. Never talk baby talk. If you do, you will encourage backwardness or errors in speech that may not disappear

later. You want your children to be fluent and able to express themselves with confidence. Encourage them in good speech by using it yourself. Should speech difficulties occur, let there be no nagging corrections, but continue using simple words distinctly, or read clearly, employ games, or encourage the child to recite, or to act—and use the nearest speech clinic for further advice.

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