

Parents Make or Mar Young Children's Speech

SPEECH, in most homes, is left to develop of itself. Some parents worry because their children seem backward in speaking. Some actually hinder progress by talking baby-talk too long. Baby talk is attractive but only in a baby. Should it persist through pre-school years into primary school, other children there will ridicule such speech. To enter a new world is a big enough strain at five years of age without being at a disadvantage with the tongue, so parents should aim at having clear speech by the fifth year.

The pattern of speech development needs to be understood. The first sounds made by baby are automatic. He cries from discomfort, squeals or gurgles or crows with pleasure. It isn't until the second year that words heard are imitated. Sometimes during this year he will begin to join a noun and verb, as "go sleep," "go play." In the third year, although with plenty of mistakes and difficulty in getting certain sounds, sentences develop. The trouble experienced with some sounds is slowly surmounted, and the child translates what he is thinking into speech. In the fourth year, and again in the fifth, the child's brain is very active. There are lots of ideas there, and he cannot always get his tongue and lips to form the words quickly enough to express all the thoughts in time. So there may be a jumbling of words and tripping over consonants. By and in the fifth year, however, if the parents have done what they should, the child should talk clearly in simple language.

What do I mean by "if the parents have done what they should"? Speech is learnt by imitation from father and mother. The final result, in the fifth year, before entering primary school, is a reproduction of the parents' speech, as quickly or as slowly as theirs, and with the same vowel intonations. The second and third years are crucial. Although loath to do so parents must abandon baby-talk back to toddler. Both father and mother should talk simply but very clearly about everything in the home or garden, when out shopping, walking, or car riding, and repeat new words slowly and in clear-cut style. If the father or mother tumble their words out, speaking too quickly, the child tries to reproduce the pace but gets caught with consonants and words will not come out properly. He recognises that he is saying things wrongly and is disturbed at it. He tries at speed again and trips up once more. This registers and he becomes frightened over certain words. He tries all the harder, struggling to get that consonant out. He stumbles over it again and again. This is how stammerers begin.

If your child enters such a phase in his speech development, don't draw attention to the stuttering or stammering. Just wait; give time for the words to be formed. Talk more slowly and very clearly yourself. You have to remember that hearing and understanding race performance with words, so you yourself should slow up your speech and be very distinct. If you keep your fast pace, the child will go on trying to copy, but continually making mistakes. As he knows they are mistakes, he may become frightened at his inability to make the particular sound or sounds that he finds troublesome at speed. At the entrance of fear—and the brain quickly warns the child the consonants that trip him are just ahead—a speech defect is confirmed. At that particular word or words there is halting, stuttering or stammering.



This is the text of a talk on health broadcast recently from ZB, ZA, YA and YZ stations of the NZBS by DR H. B. TURBOTT, Deputy-Director-General of Health

If this happens the child needs to back pedal and forget about the troublesome consonant, that seems harder to say the more he concentrates. He should put his effort to the vowel sounds just

as a singer does. He will be able to sing the worrisome words without difficulty. So he is helped to go slower, to get rhythm in a sentence—almost to sing the difficult word. A speech therapist can encourage a child quicker than a parent, but parents can greatly assist a child stumbling over speech by playing word games, helped by pictures and nursery rhymes, and by imitating animals—for example—bow-wow, meow-meow. Please don't try the old dodges of counting so many before the difficult word, or taking a deep breath before it—these ways are not recommended.

Prevention is always best. Avoid the development of speech defects in any child by resisting the temptation to talk baby-talk, by speaking slowly and clearly, and by talking often with the child about everyday things, simply and distinctly. This is the key to good speech in young children.

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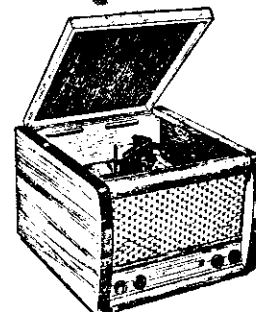
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