

## GUIDELINES FOR HELPING THE CHILD WITH UNCLEAR SPEECH AT PRE-SCHOOL

### General

Developing speech sounds (PHONOLOGY) is a gradual process and there is a wide variation in the rate at which children develop clear speech. Some children have clear speech at an early age. For others it takes longer and they experience much more difficulty in producing correct speech sounds. These children benefit from some help, usually from the age of three and a half or so.

### Strategies

- **Encourage** the use of **non-verbal communication** e.g. pointing, gesture, signing. If you use non-verbal communication to support what you say it will encourage children to use it too.
- Listen to **what** the child is trying to say rather than **how** they say it. The more you listen the easier it will be to 'tune in' to how the child speaks
- **Repeat back clearly** what the child has tried to say. This way you will provide the child with a good speech model.  
e.g. child says "Where's my tock?"  
adult says "There's your sssock", over-emphasising a little the sound which was wrong.
- **Speak slowly and clearly** so that the child can see, hear and process the sounds you make when talking to him.
- If you ask the child to repeat back what they have said, try to ask them **only once**. If they have to keep repeating themselves they may lose confidence in their ability to communicate and therefore become frustrated.
- **Do not ask them to copy your speech** – you may be asking them to do something that they are unable to do.
- **If you do not understand** what the child has said, **tell them**. Ask them to try and tell you in a different way e.g. write/draw/use gesture or signing. **Praise them for trying different ways**.
- If you and the child get stuck, try **switching to a shared familiar activity** e.g. looking at a favourite book. This takes the pressure off as

you know what he is trying to say. Perhaps return to the previous topic later.

