The generalisation of new speech sounds

If your child has not been using the right speech patterns since they started to talk, correct patterns will feel and sound wrong to them. It can take a long time for a child to use their new sound in everyday conversational speech.

Children may have difficulty using their new sound in different positions in words and in different situations. It will take time and practise for them to improve. Parents can help by:

- Doing the work given to them by the therapist so their child can practise a little every day (e.g. 5 minutes twice a day)
- Repeat the activities again and again, each time your child tries to say the sound the easier it becomes for them
- Using the same strategies that the therapist uses with your child. Ask the therapist to talk through what they are doing
- Continue to practise and build on what your child has learned between blocks of therapy

Slower progress with lots of work on generalising skills into all situations is the ideal way to develop a child’s speech.

You need to encourage your child to listen to the way that they say words. This is just as important as practising saying the words. As your child needs to be aware when they have made a mistake, so that they can start to correct themselves without your prompts. This skill is called ‘self monitoring’ and it is an important skill for your child to develop.

You can encourage the development of ‘self-monitoring’ by:

- Reminding your child to listen to the way that they say words
- Helping them to notice when they have forgotten to use their new sound
- Gradually reducing the amount of help you give your child when prompting them to use their new sound

For example – If your child is learning to say ‘c’ but forgets to use this sound in conversation, they may say “That’s my tar”, instead of “That’s my car”.

At first you can give them lots of help
E.g. “Car is one of your words. Try and say it like this ‘car’”

Then, as they improve, you can give a little less help by saying:
E.g. “That was one of your words. Try and say it with a ‘c’”

Finally, you can just give them a general reminder
E.g. “That was one of your words. Try it again”
In this way you are helping your child to learn how to correct their own speech.

Generalising speech and language skills into everyday conversation can take time and effort but spending time on this will really help your child.

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