



University Hospitals Bristol **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service  
**Cleft information**

# How you can help develop your child's speech



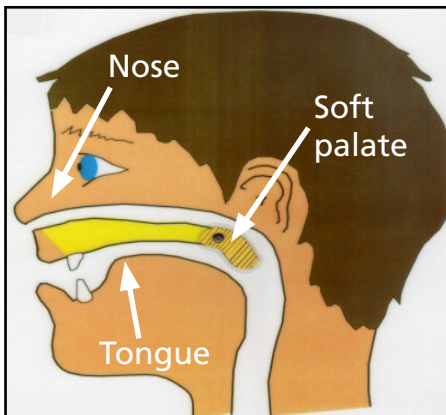
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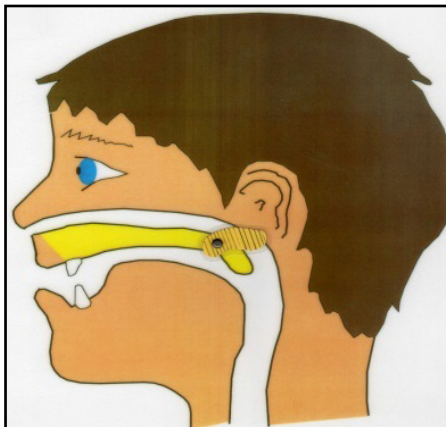
# What is the role of the palate in speech?

The palate has an important role in speech production as it closes off the nose from the mouth during speech. Most sounds produced in English (for example **p, b, t, d, k, g, f, v, s, z, sh, ch, j**) are produced with air passing through the vocal cords into the mouth, with the palate closing off the nose. The palate is raised to stop air entering the nose.

In addition to this, there are three sounds (**m, n** and **ing**) where the palate is lowered, allowing air into the nose. These sounds are therefore called 'nasals'. Try saying 'mmmmmm' and placing your hands under your nose. Can you feel the air?



Soft palate remains level allowing air to pass into the nose for **m, n, ing**.



Soft palate moves up against the back of the throat to close off the nose allowing all air to pass into the mouth for **p, b, t, d, k, g, s, sh, ch**.

# What sounds can my child make?

Before the operation(s) to repair your baby's palate, vowels and the sounds **m** and **n** are easiest to make.

Once they have had the operation on their palate, they should be able to make sounds such as **p**, **b**, **t** and **d**. Your baby will need time to learn that their mouth can do new things. As they get older, they will learn sounds such as **k**, **g**, **f** and **s**.

50 per cent of children born with a cleft palate will require speech and language therapy, as they may learn sounds incorrectly. Speech and language therapy helps children re-learn sounds correctly.

# How can you help your baby develop good speech?

Even before your child's palate is repaired, you can help them learn new speech sounds correctly. There are some quick and easy ways that may help your baby learn the correct speech sounds.

## Encourage babbling

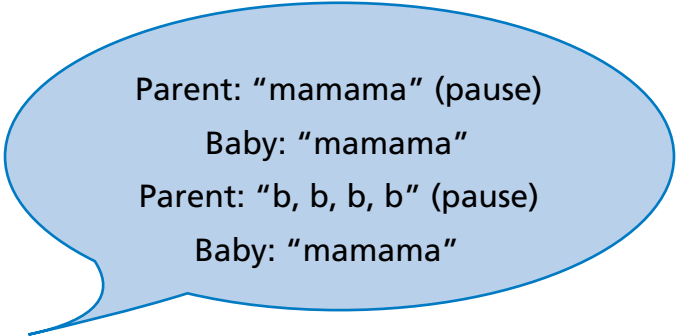
Your baby needs to listen to a speech sound before they try to copy it.

### 1. Being face to face

Being face to face is really important in allowing your baby to watch you make sounds with your mouth.

By hearing and watching you make sounds, they may be more likely to use these sounds in their speech.

Give your child examples to copy, wait for them to respond, and then respond to their attempts at making sounds:



Parent: "mamama" (pause)

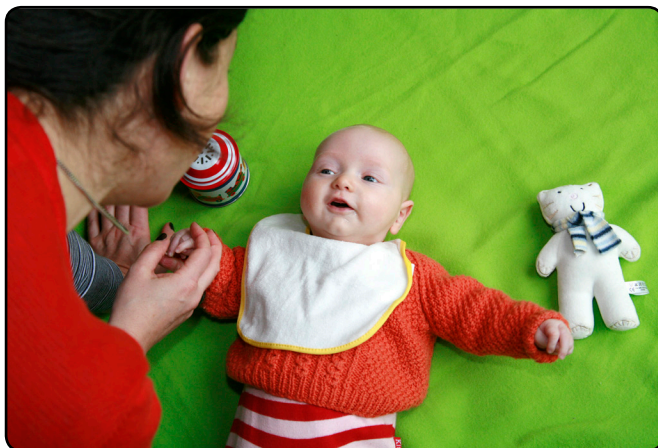
Baby: "mamama"

Parent: "b, b, b, b" (pause)

Baby: "mamama"

It doesn't matter if your child does not copy you. The main emphasis is on them **watching you** make the sound. Pause after you make sounds. If your child copies you, then great; if they don't, just make the sound again.

You can use any toy to get your baby's attention. Try using a toy they are playing with or enjoy and hold it next to your mouth so your baby looks at your mouth when you are making the sound. (The toy you use doesn't matter; just use the toy to gain your baby's attention so they look at your mouth.)

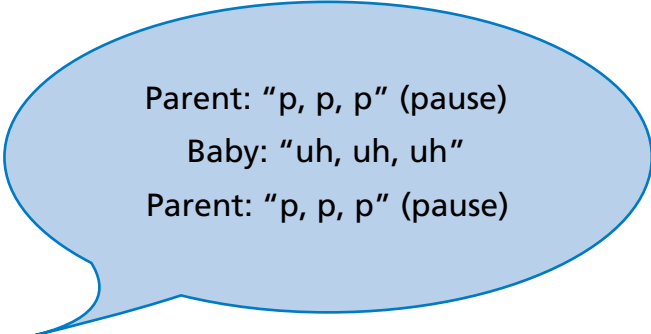


## 2. Make lip and front sounds

Sounds made with the lips are easier for your baby to copy, for example **p, b, t, d**.

Many children with a cleft palate tend to overuse the back of the mouth or the throat when they learn to speak; we want babies born with cleft to experiment with the front of the mouth.

If you hear your child say sounds in their throat, for example "uh" or a 'growly' sound, produce one of these front sounds and try not to copy or encourage the throaty sound:

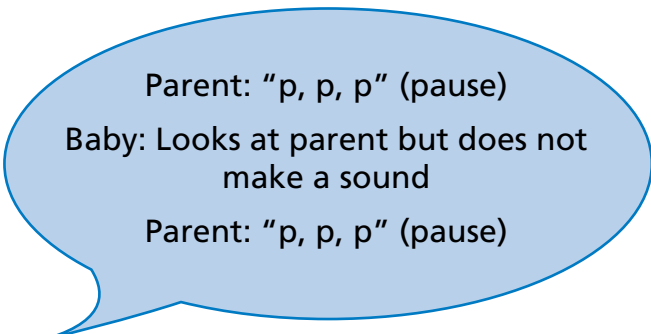


Parent: "p, p, p" (pause)

Baby: "uh, uh, uh"

Parent: "p, p, p" (pause)

If your child does not copy you, repeat the sound again.

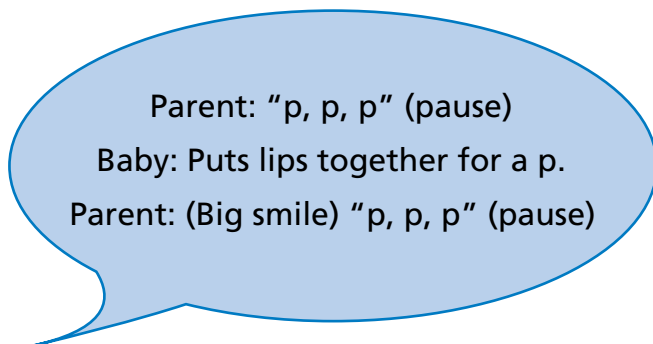


Parent: "p, p, p" (pause)

Baby: Looks at parent but does not make a sound

Parent: "p, p, p" (pause)

If your child attempts to make the sound, reward them by smiling.



You can also make sounds like "wa wa wa", blow raspberries, and stick your tongue out and see if your baby will copy you.

### **3. Make sounds quietly**

To ensure your baby hears the correct sound, make the sound quietly, almost whispered.

Don't worry if your baby has a hearing difficulty, as you will be face to face and they will be looking at you making the sound as well. Turning off background noise like the TV and radio will also help.

### **4. Everyday babble**

You can babble to your baby anywhere where you can be face to face. Bath time, in the high chair, and nappy changing times are all good examples.

You can also point out sounds around the house that are **quiet lip/front** sounds.

In the mornings and bath time:

- the dripping tap goes "t, t, t"
- scoop up bath bubbles and gently blow using "p, p" to make them 'jump'
- when you are changing a nappy, blow kisses and make a gentle sound at the end of a breath; for example, try gently blowing onto a wet wipe when it is in front of your mouth and then place your lips together to make a quiet **b** and **p** sound.



Play time:

- pop bubbles while saying "p, p, p, p, p" quietly
- move a car along and say "t, t, t, t".

Going upstairs:

- on each step say "up" or say a sound, for example "t, t, t".



## Add words too so your baby learns new vocabulary

Allow your baby to lead in play, and provide suitable toys to guide and influence.

Try commenting on what they are doing instead of asking questions so that your baby learns new words:

Baby: "ah" (looking at a ball)

Parent: "Yes, it's a ball, a big ball.  
It goes b, b, b, b, b"

Do not worry that early words your baby tries to say are unclear. Repeat the word correctly and clearly so that your child has a good example to follow. The following words are good to reinforce as they have front sounds: bye-bye, pop, teddy, daddy, boo, poo, tea, dolly, ball, ta, door.

Giving choices will also help your baby learn new words:

Parent: "Would you like the ball or  
the car?"

Baby: "ba" (looking at a ball) [or just looks/points  
to the ball without speaking]

Parent: "the ball" (passing the ball to  
the baby)

## Key messages

**Try to be  
face to face.**

Hold objects beside your mouth so your baby is looking at your mouth when you say the sounds, for example hold the ball to your mouth and say: "look at the ball, b, b, b".

Babble with quiet lip/front sounds: **p, b, t, d.**

Say sounds **quietly, almost whispered.**

Turn down background noise like the TV or radio.

It doesn't matter if your child does not copy you. The main emphasis is on them watching you make the sound.

## Useful videos to watch

Visit [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources) and click on 'Resources for parents' and then 'Through the eyes of a child' and watch the videos for a baby's view of communicating with an adult.

Visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search 'Talking Twin Babies Part 2'. This is a YouTube clip of twins having a babble conversation. You can have a 'conversation' with your baby by taking turns, copying sounds and actions and communicating face to face.

Visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search 'Still Face Experiment' to see how the baby prefers face to face interaction. The baby tries so hard to get his mum to join back in with the babble conversation when she stops responding.

## What's next?

Your child will next be seen for their first speech assessment at two years by a specialist speech and language therapist who works in the cleft lip and palate team. The speech and language therapist will watch and play with your child as well as talk to you to find out how their speech is developing.

If you have concerns before your child is seen for a speech assessment, you can contact a speech and language therapist in the cleft team sooner for advice.

# South West Cleft Service

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