EXERCISES FOR THE LIPS, TONGUE AND SOFT PALATE

ADVICE SHEETS FOR PARENTS

(With acknowledgement & thanks to The Nuffield Hearing and Speech Centre)

The following briefly explains the function of each of the lips, tongue and soft palate in speech.

LIPS

The lips are important for activities such as control of dribbling, swallowing and blowing as well as speech sound production. Your child needs to be able to open/close his lips and to move them forwards and into a spread position. During speech, some sounds such as /sh/, /w/. and /oo/ needs the lips to move forwards, other sound such as /ee/ needs the lips to be spread. It is important that your child can move his/her lips from one position to the other very fast. Lip exercises will help him gain the control of his lips and him/her to move them rapidly.

TONGUE

Tongue movement is important for chewing, licking and swallowing as well as playing a major part in speech sound production. During speech the tongue must move forwards/backwards, up/down rapidly – so that sounds are accurately produced. If your child has speech problems and finds it difficult to move his tongue accurately outside his mouth as well as inside, tongue exercises will help.

SOFT PALATE

It is difficult to see the soft palate and to see how well it is moving. However, this fleshy continuation of the hard palate (roof of the mouth) performs a very important function. When it moves up against the back of the throat, it is responsible for shutting off the nasal passages and so prevents air from passing up the nasal passages from the lungs. The soft palate adopts this position in blowing and sucking activities and also should do so for all speech sounds except /m/, /n/ and /ng/. If for any reason it is not moving very well, air will pass up the nasal passages and the speech produced will have a nasal tone.

If your child has this nasal tone to his/her speech or finds it difficult to blow and suck, exercises for the soft palate will help him/her. On the following pages there are examples of activities to encourage control of the lips, tongue and palate. Your Speech Therapist will have demonstrated some of the activities to you and your child. Make sure you are clear about what you are trying to achieve. If your child has difficulty with an exercise, continue to work on the other areas and discuss the difficulty with your Speech Therapist.

EXERCISES FOR THE LIPS

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Candles, bubbles, straws, whistles, blow pipes, cotton wool, tissue paper, ping pong balls, lipstick, sweets, mirror.

ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE LIP ROUNDING

Aim to improve lip rounding, lip protrusion and control the flow of air out of the mouth. This will also exercise the soft palate.

- Use a mirror and encourage him/her to copy an "oo" shape. At first, you may need to gently push the lips from a tight stretch position to the round position.
- Push lips forwards as for kissing. Practice kissing a teddy/dolly.
- Push lips forward and make round shapes in a saucer of icing sugar.
- Paint lips with lip-stick and make round prints on paper or a mirror.
- Carnival blowers/whistles – use "instruments" with rounded mouth-pieces to encourage lip rounding. These should be held with the lips and not the teeth.
- Hold a pencil between upper lips and nose – good for older children.
- Candles – use small cake candles, stuck in something steady e.g. plasticine. Light the candles and encourage your child to blow them out with a gentle blow and rounded lips.
- Blowing candles through a straw – if your child has difficulty in the above activity, try blowing out the candles through a straw. Make sure that the straw is held between the lips and not between the teeth. You can check this by looking at the end of the straw to see if it has been bitten. If your child finds it difficult to hold a thin plastic straw, then try varying widths of plastic tubing e.g. beer-making rubes. Try to blow out the candles one at a time rather than all at once, so that there is plenty of repetition of small puffs and therefore more exercise.
- Bubbles can be blown through the plastic wand or by using a straw through the wand. This produces many small bubbles. Also try blowing bubbles in a drink, using a straw.
- Try blow-football using straws and ping-pong balls. This is more fun if two people, sitting opposite each other blow down straws at the same time. Cotton wool and tissue paper can be used in the same way.

ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE PUTTING LIPS TOGETHER

- Lip Smacking. Put chocolate spread etc. on the top lip and encourage your child to take it off with the bottom lip. Also try this the other way round i.e. place chocolate on bottom lip and take it off with the top lip.
  The tongue should not be used for this exercise – only the lips.

- Using lips to pick up sweets. At first try to pick up quite large sweets with lips e.g. smarties and gradually work down to smaller sweets e.g. jelly tots, dolly mixtures etc. Remember only use the lips not the teeth.

- Lip Printing. Paint lips with lipstick and make lips together prints on paper or a mirror.

ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE LIP SPREADING

- Use a mirror and encourage the child to smile.
- Lip printing – as above, but encourage a wide smile when producing the print.

ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE CHANGES IN LIP SHAPE

- Without using any speech sounds, practice changing from a round to a spread lip shape. Perhaps pretend to be a goldfish for a round shape and then smile like a clown to produce a spread shape.

- Using lipstick and paper, try making a round shape, then a spread shape or a wide shape followed by lips together. Any combination of the four shapes should be attempted.

- Alternate kissing (with lips rounded) and smiling at (with lips spread) a teddy/dolly.
- Say "oo" (really rounding lips), then "ee" (really stretching lips to a spread shape). Exaggerate the movement and use your fingers to help the movements if they prove difficult.

EXERCISES FOR THE TONGUE

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Try to discourage head and/or jaw movements which mean the tongue is not actually doing any of the work. A hand on his/her head may serve as a gentle reminder. Using a mirror can also help the child monitor jaw and tongue position.

Try to avoid using the lips instead of the tongue. To avoid this make sure the tongue is protruding before he/she starts any licking activities.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Small plate or saucer, a variety of sweet things e.g. 100's and 1000'2, chocolate vermicelli, sugar, sherbet, chocolate spread, honey, jam, ice-cream, chopped nuts, marmite, ice lollies.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR PROTRUSION

- Place some of one of the suggested foods onto a plate. Demonstrate licking the food off the plate whilst it is on the table. Encourage your child to lick the food up using the tip of his/her tongue.
- Look in a mirror and encourage him/her to copy you sticking out your tongue.
- By applying slight pressure to the tip of the tongue with a spatula you can encourage the tongue to move forward.
- Put some of the food e.g. 100's and 1000's on the end of a spatula and place the spatula in front of the child's lips. Encourage the child to move the tongue forward to touch the stick.

Increase the difficulty by moving the stick a little further from the lips. Once protrusion is easy, ask the child to lick the food off the stick.

- Using the stick, or your fingers, dab one of the foods onto a position on the lips and encourage your child to lick it off. Aim to get upward, downward and sideways movements.
- Repeat the above but use a spatula with food on it and hold at different points around the mouth. This encourages further stretching of the tongue.
- Try everyday activities such as licking lollies, ice-cream, gummed paper, stars, envelopes etc.

ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING TONGUE ELEVATION

Once protrusion has been achieved, try the following exercises to improve tongue elevation:

- Assist the tongue by gently pushing the tongue tip up with your fingers, or the spatula.
- Work in front of a mirror, encouraging him/her to copy lifting the tongue up. You could say "try and touch your nose".
- Try putting one of the sweet things on the top lip and encourage him/her to lick it off.
- Hold a spatula with 100's and 1000's etc. on it horizontally above the top lip and get him/her to try and lick them off.
- With 100's and 1000's etc. on the end of the stick, ask your child to open his mouth wide, place the end of the stick against the upper teeth, so that approximately one quarter of an inch protrudes beyond the teeth and the food is facing down. Encourage him/her to lick the stick.

Very often there is a tendency to either close the jaw or use the lips, rather than making the tongue do the work. Watch out for this and try to ensure that the tongue is being used fully by encouraging the child to keep the mouth open.

If your child has difficulty with elevating his/her tongue:

- Go back and do some more practice with licking off his top lip.
- Use a mirror, and encourage him to copy the correct position.
- Try putting a dab of something which is sticky such as jam on the ridge behind the teeth and see if he can lick it off.
- Also just gently touching the two points of contact i.e. the end of the tongue and the ridge behind the teeth may give him an awareness of the correct placement.

Tongue Tip Mobility:

- Place the tongue through a ring
- Tie a weight on a string and tie it to the ring

Encourage the child to elevate the tongue.

ACTIVITIES FOR ENCOURAGING TONGUE MOBILITY

- Spread something like ham, honey, chocolate spread etc. around your child's lips and see if he/she can lick them clean. Make sure that he/she uses his/her tongue and not his/her lips.
- Copy tongue movements in front of a mirror e.g. side to side, up and down, and licking around the lips.
- Licking ice-cream, lollies etc. Make sure that he/she uses his/her tongue and not bite with his/her teeth or suck with his/her lips.
- Coat the back of a large tablespoon with something sticky e.g. treacle and let him/her lick it clean.
- Put something in a small short container e.g. small egg cup, and encourage your child to lick it clean.
- Hold a spoon or a spatula against the tongue. Push against the tongue, resisting it.

Note that as most of these exercises involve eating sweet food, it is a good idea to make your child clean his/her teeth afterwards.

EXERCISES FOR THE SOFT PALATE

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Straws, candles, bubbles, cotton wool, plastic tubing, paint, blow pipe and football.

ACTIVITIES NOT INVOLVING SPEECH SOUNDS

- Blowing out candles. Set up a row of five or six candles placed in something steady e.g. plasticine. Aim to blow each candle using one breath per candle. Aim also for long blows by attempting to blow out all six candles together.
- Blowing out candles by saying /p/ gently.
- Blowing bubbles through the plastic wand, or other bubble blowers.
- Blowing carnival blowers/ musical instruments, etc.
- Blowing ping-pong balls, small pieces of tissue paper, cotton wool etc.
  Have races from one side of the room to another.
- Blowing paper fish into a pond. Also try using straw or plastic tubing.
- Using a straw, blow bubbles in water/orange juice etc.
- Blow painting – place a small blob of paint in the centre of a large piece of paper and blow the paint through the straw to produce a pattern.
- Try holding air under pressure in mouth e.g. blow out cheeks and explode air though the lips, or hold nose with fingers and blow. While blowing try to remove fingers and maintain the air stream through the mouth.

ACTIVITIES INVOLVING SPEECH SOUNDS

- Breathe in on a yawn movement and breathe out on the vowel "ah".
- Watch palate movement in a mirror while repeating "ah, ah, ah: with mouth wide open.
- Humming:

  Hum – blow out cheeks - hum

  Hum – blow out cheeks – say /p/

  Hum – blow out cheeks – say /b/

  Blow out cheeks - /p/

  Blow out cheeks - /b/