



Changing Faces, Transforming Lives

STRATEGIES FOR SPEECH & LANGUAGE FOR YOUR CHILD BEFORE CLEFT PALATE REPAIR

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By the time you receive this handout, your child has likely undergone his/her initial cleft lip repair. Congratulations! Now, as you await the cleft palate repair (usually scheduled for around one year of age and determined by your craniofacial team’s plastic surgeon), we want to begin thinking about how to expand your child’s language skills. Here are some strategies you can use to help your child continue to develop his/her speech and language during this time:

#1 Capitalize on Strengths

Encourage and reinforce babbling sounds that your baby can produce even with an open cleft.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, typical babbling development usually begins between 6 and 9 months. Babbling includes a string of consonant and vowel productions that are merged together. This means the baby is experimenting with words or sounds in his/her mouth but they are not yet able to string together these words to form a meaningful word or utterance.

Since your child has an open cleft that is awaiting repair, he/she will not be able to produce certain sounds in the mouth at this time. These sounds could include: **P, B, T, D, K, G, S, Z**, and others. We do not want to model these sounds prior to palate repair as it could lead the child to develop incorrect speech patterns that will be difficult to correct later on, or cause communicative frustration as they cannot produce the sound correctly.

So what can we do to help a child continue to develop his/her language?

Tip: Focus on the sounds we know your child can produce, even with an open cleft palate!
These sounds usually include:



Your child can also make a number of different vowel sounds to correspond with these consonants! Here are just a few examples of target babbling strings that you can model for your child during play until the palate is repaired:

Nanananana

Yiyiyayeye

Mamamomomo

Wawawawowo

#2: Functional Vocabulary

As your child begins progressing through a number of babbling strings using the above consonants, you can begin to model functional vocabulary with the same sounds. Functional vocabulary can be used in meaningful interactions and activities of daily living, such as during mealtimes or while playing. Here are some examples of words that include the above target sounds that you can model for your child:

Mommy/ Mama	Hi	 Moo	More	 Moon
Noon	Wow/ Woah	Yeah	No	Me
Ear	 Eye	Nana	Neigh	Mine

Note: Remember that a child's first word is usually not produced until right around 12 months, so while these are great models, we do not expect children to say these words perfectly or consistently at this time!

#3: Communication, Communication, Communication!!

Communicative interactions with your little one are extremely important. Do not be afraid of initiating language interactions with your child at this time. Use language during play as you would with any other child all while keeping in mind the above tips. Ask your Speech-Language Pathologist for some tips and tricks if you need ideas on how to encourage language and develop play skills at home.



If you consistently hear sounds that are being made at the throat (known as glottal stops) or air/sounds coming through the nose while playing/communicating with your baby, let your Speech-Language Pathologist know. We will want to redirect these productions to prevent speech and language errors for the future.

Questions or Concerns?

Speak with the Speech-Language Pathologist on your Craniofacial team about your concerns. There are many factors to consider at this time as your baby is continuing to develop and grow. They can help guide you through your baby's individual path to speech and language development as well as assist with referrals for speech therapy as indicated.