Get to Know Your Speech Sounds: /s/

How is the Sound Produced?
- /s/ is typically made with the tongue tip touching the alveolar ridge (the bony ridge behind the teeth). You can also touch the tongue tip to the lower front teeth.
  - Teeth are together.
  - Lips are apart with the corners pulled back, almost like a smile.
  - Air is flowing over the tongue through the front of the mouth. /s/ is a fricative, so the air flows for a longer time.
  - The voice is off; the vocal cords are not vibrating.

When Does the Sound Develop?
- 50% of children produce the /s/ sound by age 3. This is when the sound is emerging.
- 90% of children produce the /s/ sound by age 8. This is when the sound should be acquired. If the child is not producing the sound by this point, speak with a speech-language pathologist.

Common Errors
- The /s/ sound is one of the most commonly used consonant sounds in English; this makes someone’s speech tricky to understand if /s/ is misarticulated.
- The /s/ sound can be misarticulated with a frontal lisp. This is when the tongue comes out in front of the teeth when it should stay behind, making a “th” sound.
- /s/ has a “slushy” sound quality when someone has a lateral lisp. Air escapes through the sides of the tongue rather than being directed through the front of the mouth.

Tips for Cueing
1. Verbal
   - “Teeth together!”
   - “Tongue behind your teeth!”
   - “Big smile!”
   - “Make the snake sound. Sssssssss!”

(*) Tips for Cueing continued on page 2)
2. Visual

- Model how the sound “looks”. Keep your teeth together, tongue behind your teeth. Or, show the student the picture above.
- Have the child make the /s/ sound in the mirror. Ask the child if they saw their tongue. Were their teeth closed?
- Close the hand before a word with an /s/ sound to remind the child to keep their teeth together.

3. Tactile

- Model how the sound “looks”. Keep your teeth together, tongue behind your teeth. Or, show the student the picture shown at left.
- Have the child make the /s/ sound in the mirror. Ask the child if they saw their tongue. Were their teeth closed?
- Close the hand before a word with an /s/ sound to remind the child to keep their teeth together.

Practice***

- Spelling can be confusing! Many letters can represent one sound; /s/ can be made with the letter(s) “s”, “c”, and “ss”. The letter “x” is actually a /ks/ cluster. Many words have the letter “s”, but the word is pronounced with the /z/ sound (voice on), as in “dogs”, “was”, and “closet”. “Sh” contains the letter “s” but does not make the /s/ sound. Even though a word may end with another letter, if /s/ sound is pronounced last, it is considered an /s/ final word (e.g., case). The /s/ sound is underlined in these practice targets.

Phonemic Awareness

- Name each picture. Point to the pictures with the /s/ sound.

Isolation

- $s$ $s$ $s$
- $ssssssss$
- $s$ $s$ $ssssss$

Isolation

- see-see-see-see-see
- ice-ice-ice-ice-ice
- isa-isa-isa-isa-isa
- see-isa-see-isa-see-isa
- see-isa-saw-so-see-saw-so
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**Word**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Final</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Recurring</th>
<th>Blend</th>
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<td>buʃ</td>
<td>fussy</td>
<td>ʃass</td>
<td>skip</td>
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<td>baseball</td>
<td>ʃauʃer</td>
<td>crispy</td>
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<td>furioʃ</td>
<td>erasər</td>
<td>Mississippı</td>
<td>pest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phrase**

- on the ceiling
- chase the cat
- cherry blossom
- toss the baseball
- assemble the see-saw
- the slow snail

**Sentence**

- She drove a silver car.
- The teacher arrived to class late.
- My dog is a messy eater.
- Yes, the dinosaur was silly.
- We had recess at sunset.
- Lone can spin the basketball.

**Structured Language**

- Tell a story about a super loud, silly sound with your best /s/.
- Draw a picture of a castle. Explain your picture using the words “castle”, “sign”, and “princess” with your best /s/ sound.
- Pick out a page in a book and mark the words with the /s/ sound with sticky notes. Read the page with your best /s/ sound.

**Unstructured Language**

- Talk about a vacation using your best /s/ sound.
- Explain how to play your favorite game using your best /s/ sound.
- Read a page of a book with your best /s/ sound (unmarked).

*These milestones are based on monolingual, native English speakers. If a child speaks more than one language, acquisition of English sounds can be influenced by the other language(s). These differences do not necessarily indicate a speech sound disorder. Please consult with a speech-language pathologist.

**Not all cues are appropriate in all cases. Please consult with a speech-language pathologist before cueing.

***Ask your child’s speech-language pathologist which targets are appropriate to practice.

† “Mouse”, “sail”, and “lasso” contain the /s/ sound.

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