

How to get the most out of your speech therapy sessions.

(Thanks to 'SmallTALK Speech Therapy for the inspiration).

Ongoing speech therapy can be a notable investment financially and a time consuming undertaking for busy families. The short and long term benefits of speech therapy are fairly obvious, but what can YOU do to maximise your child's progress?

We all have the same goal in mind '*continued progress leads to faster communication independence.*' We all naturally want to achieve their goals in the shortest amount of time possible.

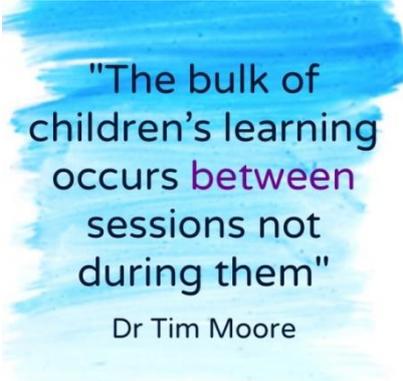
Here are 10 tips to get the most out of speech therapy sessions and maximise your child's progress.

Tip # 1 Session Attendance

Should I be in the therapy room? Should I wait outside the therapy room?

It is preferred that you stay in the room to collaborate in therapy tasks. Being in the therapy room means you will see first hand the activities and how they relate to your child's goals, you can ask questions as they arise during the session, make suggestions to the therapist about different ways you have practiced this skill at home and offer encouragement to your child to increase their motivation.

Tip # 2 Daily Home Practice



"The bulk of children's learning occurs **between** sessions not during them"

Dr Tim Moore

Your child will usually spend up to 1 hour a fortnight in their speech therapy session and 332 hours a fortnight with parents, educators and carers. Just like learning an instrument or a new language attending a class for one hour has minimal impact on your skills if you don't practise in between classes.

This is the tip that will make a huge difference to the pace of your child's progress in speech therapy. My general recommendation is that you 'practise' with your child for at least 15 minutes each day. The more practise you can do, without your child becoming resistant, the better. As therapists, we are fighting an uphill battle if there is no follow-up occurring at home and school.

Tip #3 Ask your Therapist Questions

I love your questions!

Ask your therapist questions about the therapy activities, home variations to the activities, why a certain goal is being targeted, how your child is progressing with their goals, if and when a certain goal can be targeted...

Asking your therapist questions gets both your therapist and yourself thinking and can sprout many new collaborative ideas.

Tip # 4 Give your therapist specific feedback

You know your child best!

Your therapist is eager to hear your feedback and ideas on how to facilitate your child's learning. Don't be afraid to let us know your child's preferences as this can make all the difference to their engagement. If you know your child dislikes loud noises, doesn't respond to verbal praise, loves a certain type of praise like clapping hands and cheering, let us know or even remind us mid session. As therapists we work with a wide variety of kids and need to adjust our level of feedback and interaction for every child based on their preferences, which can be hard work when one child loves over the top praise and another dislikes any praise at all.

Update your therapist on your child's progress at home. Let us know if and how your child is using their skills outside of the therapy room.

Tip #5 Educate family members and carers

Many kids spend a fair amount of time in school/preschool/day care or with relatives and carers. If this is the case it can make a huge difference sharing information about your child's therapy goals with their educators and carers. Carers, relatives and educators are most welcome to come along to observe your child's therapy session.

Another way to involve carers, relatives and educators is to share your child's weekly therapy goals and progress in a verbal or written format.

Tip # 6 Give your child frequent feedback on their goals

Keep your child motivated by giving them specific praise during everyday situations. Your child is always eager to please you and giving them positive feedback can make a big difference.

Try to relate your feedback to your child's goals such as:

- Great talking
- Awesome listening
- I like how you kept your tongue inside your mouth for your "s" sound
- You are getting so clever at using your "l" sound
- Wow you remembered to use your new word all by yourself
- That's right, "HE" is running. I like how you remembered to use "he" for a boy.

Tip #7 Display their goals

"Out of sight out of mind"

Families are busy. A week can fly by and before you know it it's time to take your child to speech therapy and you haven't practised as much as you would have liked.

One tip from some of our families is to put your child's Goals in a place where you will see it daily. Where do you keep your child's therapy materials? In a folder filed into a draw out of sight? On your computer?

Please DISPLAY your child's goals!

For some families that's on the fridge in the kitchen for others it's stuck on the door of their child's room. The more times you see it the more you will be reminded about your child's goals and think about incorporating practise into their day.

Tip #8 Take note

During the therapy process your therapist will be collecting data. After all how can you demonstrate and track progress without data? Your therapist should always be able to gauge how your child is progressing with their goals by referring to the collected data as well as parent reports.

How can you help?

Your estimations are just as valuable as data in the therapy process, so instead of giving us real raw data (63% during practise on Thursday) or general comments (he's doing well with it) it is very useful to give an estimate such as "Jonny is doing very well at using his pronouns "he" and "she" – I would estimate that during our conversations he remembers the correct pronoun about 70% of the time and can fix it up the rest of the time when asked."

Many parents often get into the therapy room and have difficulty remembering some of the things that happened during the week that they wanted to share such as their child saying a new word or using one of their new skills. Keeping a little list during the week on your phone or on the fridge might help you keep track of things to share with your therapist.

Tip #9 Generalise the task into an everyday activity

Generalising means taking the new skills your child has learned in therapy and using them in as many different and varied settings as possible outside of the clinic. Generalising skills ensures that your child can use their new skills in other situations just as well as they can in the clinic. Generalisation helps your child remember the skill and use it from day to day throughout life. There is no use your child learning a new skill but only being able to use it when sitting at a table with their therapist or carer– we want your child using this skill every day in their general living which involves using the skills with different people, in different environments and in a range of everyday activities.

Some things to think about when encouraging your child to generalise their new skills learnt in speech therapy:

- **Use different people** – this might be with a parent, siblings, relatives, teachers or school friends
- **Different settings** – at home, school, a relative's house, in the park, in the car and in the community
- **Different times** – Not always practicing an activity at the same time everyday and practicing in different ways.
- **Different instructions** – Asking different questions to get the same response from your child (e.g. "what's your address?" and "where do you live?").
- **Different materials** – Use books and iPad games that are different from those used in therapy to target the skill. Use new pictures or pictures that are known. Try using a mixture of pictures and real objects.

Tip # 10 Keep your therapy team up to date

As your child's parent/caregiver you are most often the central source of information for your child's therapy team. Professionals in your child's team try to communicate often and collaborate to ensure that your child is receiving relevant and high quality intervention to meet their needs. In order to ensure your therapy team are on the same page update your child's therapists on medical changes, changes to your child's professional team, changes to your child's education such as a new school or teacher, changes to your child's funding allocation, updated NDIS goals and so on. Of course it is up to you to decide who needs to communicate with who in your child's therapy team and appropriate permissions are sought before any communication occurs.

Keeping your therapist up to date with your child's current health team, medical profile and funding allocations often results in a more integrated service delivery for your child.