

What to Work on In Speech Therapy:

All children with a history of cleft lip or palate are different and should be treated as such. There is no one treatment plan that will adequately serve each child with this condition. However, there are certain aspects of therapy that we should consider for all children with cleft lip and palate as a part of their condition. The following are some general goals that should be considered:

1. Establish correct oral articulatory placement and/or airflow direction and pressure build up at the target place, using behavioral, articulation (motor-phonetic) therapy.

This goal includes a lot of skills that have to do with getting the mouth to do the correct thing to produce speech sounds. We can target getting the articulators (tongue, lips, etc.) in the right places, keeping the air flowing out the mouth instead of the nose (unless it's a nasal sound), and building up air pressure to produce certain sounds (like stop-plosive sounds). We can do this using behavioral and articulation therapy.

2. Maximize the intra-oral air pressure build up during speech sound production.

Children with cleft lip and palate often have trouble building up air pressure to produce speech sounds. This may be from structural problems that still exist (like holes in the palate) or it may be due to habits that the child learned when their were structural problems even though those problems have since been fixed. We can teach children to build up the air pressure for speech sounds as best as they possibly can based on their current structures and limitations.

3. Teach new motor speech patterns to replace compensatory maladaptive articulation errors.

When children with un-repaired cleft lip and palate learn to speak, they tend to compensate for structural problems by either putting their articulators in the wrong positions or replacing difficult sounds with easier ones. After the clefts are repaired, these children often still use those errors because of the habits they have formed. Our job is to help them un-learn those incorrect ways to say speech sounds and learn the correct ways instead.

How to Teach a Child Correct Air Flow:

While you are working on improving the placement for sounds using a standard articulation approach, you should also make sure to teach and establish appropriate intra-oral air flow for these sounds (no air escaping through the nose). This can be done using a few different techniques:

- Provide verbal feedback on whether or not the child is letting air come out the nose
- Place a mirror under the nose and instruct the child to watch for it to fog up. If it fogs up, that means there is air coming out through the nose
- Use a tool that will measure the amount of air coming through the nose and provide immediate visual feedback, such as a See Scape

For More Information, Go To: <http://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/overview-of-speech-therapy-for-children-with-cleft-palate>