



## How to Stop Mumbling Handout

### **What's Included:**

This handout includes step-by-step directions on how to help a child stop mumbling and speak more clearly. This is designed for children who are physically able to say all speech sounds correctly but when they speak naturally, they tend to leave out sounds or speak so quickly that no one can understand them.

This handout includes step-by-step directions on what to do to help a child who mumbles, along with a place to take data on how the child is doing with each step.

### **More Information:**

For more information on helping children who mumble, check out this article:

<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/5-steps-to-cure-mumbling/>



## How to Teach a Child Not to Mumble

### Rationale:

So what do you do with the child who knows how to say all of her sounds correctly, but in conversational speech she mumbles and doesn't articulate well? I hear this question from parents and teachers all the time! My favorite description of this is "Mush Mouth". I'm not sure who came up with that description but I hear it from teachers a lot. Diagnosis: Mush Mouth. Probably not a technical term. This technique will provide you with a straight forward way to help teach you child not to mumble. Make sure that you complete each of these steps but be patient, each step may take many sessions or even weeks to master. Practice makes perfect!!

### Age of Mastery:

By three years of age, your child should be understood about 75% of the time by a stranger. By four years, that goes up to 75-90% and by 5 years of age it should be above 90%. Any child older than 5 should be understand almost all of the time. If your child is not understood by strangers as well as she should be but she isn't making any consistent errors that you can find (like "oh, she never says her /k/ or /g/ sounds"), then she may be a mumbler. Try these steps and see if it improves.

### Learning Steps:

1. Mumbling Awareness
2. Mumbling Practice
3. Create a Cue
4. Practice Using the Cue
5. Generalize the Cue

### Sample IEP Goals:

- By <Date>, Child will identify mumbled vs. clear speech in another speaker (not herself) on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days.
- By <Date>, Child will demonstrate mumbled and/or clear speech upon request when describing scenes from pictures on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days.
- By <Date>, Child will use clear speech (reduce number of sound substitutions or omissions) when given a specific, non-verbal cue on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days.
- By <Date>, 80% of Child's sentences during a spontaneous speech sample will be found intelligible by an unfamiliar listener with no more than 2 non-verbal cues as needed on 3 consecutive data collection days.

## Fixing Mumbling Step One: Mumbling Awareness

### Description:

The first thing you need to do is teach your child what it means to mumble. Tell your child that you want to talk to him about mumbling. Ask first if he knows what it means to mumble. If he can give you a good definition, then you're already on your way! If not, tell him that when people mumble, they don't say all of their sounds right so it's hard to understand them. They might talk to quietly, leave sounds out, slur words together, etc. Basically, define mumbling for your child by describing what he does when he is mumbling.

### Activities:

Tell your child you're going to play a game where he has to tell you if you are mumbling or not. For this, you may want to write some sentences on cards beforehand so you don't run out of things to say. On each turn, read a sentence for your child. Speak very articulately on some sentences and on others, mumble it all together. If your child bores of this quickly, you could play a board game while you do this and say one sentence before each turn in the game. Practice this until your child can identify when your sentences are mumbled or not. To make it more fun, you could even give your child a buzzer (like from the game Taboo) or a bell and have him sound it every time you are mumbling. At the time that I'm writing this, there is an i-device app called "[Bang! Buzzer](#)" that is literally just a buzzer that makes various sounds. It's quite fun.

### When to Move On:

When your child can identify mumbling in someone else's speech with about 80% accuracy, move on to the next step.

### Data Collection (Mark if he can tell when you're mumbling):

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
<b>Identify Mumbling in Someone Else's Speech</b>							

## Fixing Mumbling Step Two: Mumbling Practice

### Description:

Now it's your child's turn to mumble. Wait, she was already doing that! That's ok, we need to make sure she can demonstrate the difference. This may be the only time she's encouraged to mumble!

### Activities:

Have your child practice reading sentences or describing pictures in books using mumbled speech or not-mumbled speech. Give the not-mumbled speech a name like "clear speech", "good speech" or "articulate speech". If your child is too young to read, show your child pictures (such as photos you've taken, photos from the internet, or pictures in books) and have her create a sentence about what's happening in the picture. Before your child says her sentence, tell her to either use her mumbled speech or clear speech (or whatever you're calling it). Keep practicing this until your child is able to speak sentences clearly on command.

### When to Move On:

When your child can demonstrate both mumbling and clear speech with about 80% accuracy, move on to the next step. It's very important that she can do the clear speech part, we need that for the next few steps.

### Modifications:

If your child is having trouble with this step, you may want to back up and try just saying single words or simple phrases like "my ball" with clear speech. Have her focus on saying every sound in the word or phrase. Then, you can work your way up to having your child speak longer phrases and sentences clearly. Talk about how when we use our clear speech we have to be very careful to say every sound, to slow down, and to speak loudly enough to be heard.

### Data Collection (Mark if she can demonstrate mumbled or clear speech when you ask):

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
<b>Demonstrate Mumbled and Clear Speech</b>							

## Fixing Mumbling Step Three: Creating a Cue

### Description:

Now that your child knows how to produce clear speech on command, you need to create a visual cue that you can use to remind your child when he starts mumbling. This will help you in the next few steps as you teach your child to generalize not mumbling to other settings.

### Activities:

For younger children, try finding a picture cue like a picture of a boy speaking or a picture of a mouth. You want something that will clearly remind your child to use clear speech. Tell your child that when you show him this cue, he needs to remember to use his clear speech. For an older child, invite him to think of a good cue with you. Tell him that you want to come up with a visual cue that you can give him to remind him not to mumble that won't embarrass him if he's in front of other people. Ask him what he thinks the cue should be first. If he can't think of anything, offer up some suggestions like touching your mouth, pulling on your ear, or raising your eyebrows. Try to make it something that anyone could do so that you can easily transfer this to other adults in your child's life, like teachers (example: touching the necklace you always wear won't be an effective cue for your child's male teacher to use).

### When to Move On:

Once you have come up with a cue and your child can reliably tell you that the cue means he should use his clear speech, you're free to move on to the next step!

### Data Collection (Write when you have agreed on a cue):

<b>Our Cue Is:</b>	
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## Fixing Mumbling Step Four: Practicing the Cue

### Description:

Now that you've both agreed on a cue. It's time to practice using it. Practice just at home in a structured environment for now. You don't want to try it someplace super distracting to start with. That would be too overwhelming for your child.

### Activities:

Sit down with your child and tell her you're going to practice using the cue. Remind your child that every time she sees the cue, it means she's mumbling and she needs to use her clear speech. Tell her that she can catch you mumbling as well using the same cue (make sure you do some mumbling on purpose also so it doesn't seem like you're just picking on her). If your child is pretty talkative, you can have her just tell you about something that happened recently. Some popular topics are "what did you do at recess today?" or "tell me about your last birthday party". If your child doesn't readily start conversations with you, try having her read you a simple book or describe what's happening in pictures. You could also play a game or play with your child's favorite toy as long as it's not something that will prevent her from talking (like video games). Every time your child starts to mumble, use the cue. At first, your child may not always catch the cue so you can give gentle reminders like "oh look, I'm doing the cue!". After a while, your child shouldn't need you to say anything, you should just be able to use it silently.

### When to Move On:

Once your child responds to the cue about 80% of the time, you are ready to move on to the next step.

### Modifications:

At this point, you may have to go back and practice the clear speech if she's not able to do it every time she sees the cue. Make sure she remembers how to use clear speech and then try the cue.

### Data Collection (Mark if she switches to her clear speech after you give her the cue silently):

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Switch to Clear Speech After the Cue							

## Fixing Mumbling Step Five: Generalizing the Cue

### Description:

Now that your child understands the cue, it's time to start using it other places.

### Activities:

Tell your child that you're going to start using the cue other places and then just use it every once in a while around the house when you hear him mumbling and see if he picks up on it. Just like in the last step, you may have to point it out at first until he gets used to looking for it. You don't need to use it every time he mumbles because you don't want him to get frustrated or mad at you, but just start off slow and build your way up. Once it is successful for you, you can also start teaching other adults in your child's life to do this. You can show teachers, other parents/grandparents, caregivers, etc. Teachers will be especially grateful to have a technique that they can use to get your child to speak more clearly without embarrassing him in front of his classmates.

As I said before, be patient because each of these steps may take a while to master. The key is to try to keep it fun and not make it feel like you're punishing your child for doing something wrong. You just want to make it easier for others to understand him! You can even talk to him about why he thinks it might be important to not mumble and have an open discussion about the benefits of speaking clearly. I know it sounds cheesy, but sometimes children really just need to talk through something with an adult to guide their discovery. Once your child is motivated to change the behavior on his own, it will make it so much easier for you to work with him on it.

### When to Move On:

Once your child is able to respond to the cue and change his speech about 80% of the time in a variety of contexts, you will probably notice that he catches himself and fixes it on his own more and more frequently. You can talk to him about looking for cues that other people don't understand him (like looking confused) and encourage him to use his clear speech when he notices those cues as well.

**Data Collection (Mark if he switches to clear speech when you give the cue in a variety of settings or with a variety of adults):**

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
<b>Switch to Clear Speech After the Cue</b>							