

Palatal / Lateral Sounds

Palatal and lateral lisps are not found in typical speech development and can be tricky sounds to treat in therapy. These lisps commonly affect the 's' sound however can also affect the following sounds - z, sh, ch and j.

What causes a palatal / lateral lisp sound?

With a palatal lisp the mid-section of the tongue touches the muscular part at the back of the roof of the mouth (soft palate). Try producing a 'h' closely followed by a 'y' and prolonging it to see what this sounds like.

With a lateral lisp air is forced down the sides of the tongue instead of down the middle. Because a lateral lisp often sounds like the child has too much saliva in their mouth it is sometimes referred to as a 'slushy ess' or a 'slushy lisp'.

How can you make a clear 's' sound?

The tongue position for a normal 's' is the **tip** touching the bumpy bit just behind the teeth (the alveolar ridge). The air flows down the **centre** of the tongue. It helps to use sounds the child can produce accurately in a similar place in the mouth e.g. 't' and 'th' as a foundation for therapy.

- As a 't' is made in the same place in the mouth as an 's' it can be effective to make a 'long t' sound as this will turn into a 's' sound e.g. "tsssssss." Alternatively you could try fast repetitions of the 't' sound e.g. t-t-t-t-t which has the same effect. For younger children the visual of climbing the rungs of a slide or a dripping tap when saying the 't' and then making the 's' when coming down the slide/ turning on the tap fully might help.
- It can help to make an exaggerated "th" sound (tongue sticking out between the teeth) and then gently retracting the tongue back into the mouth just behind the teeth, this should enable the correct tongue position and help to direct the air down the middle of the tongue.
- Hold a straw gently in your mouth using the middle of your tongue (so the straw is against the top of your mouth). Start blowing and then gradually pull the straw out. This can help direct the air flow down the middle of the tongue.



It can also help to refer to the techniques above as making a 'new' sound as oppose to an 's' and giving this a new name e.g. the exploding 't' / the lazy 't' / the retracted 't' / something personal to the child. By calling it something new this will prevent the child from reverting straight back to their unclear 's' in therapy.

It may take time and **daily** practise before your child begins to find the sound easier and are able to produce it clearly and consistently. Persevere with **one** technique at a time, rather than rushing through them all.

It is important to ensure your child can produce a clear 's' on its own initially before moving on, please see our other advice sheets on single sounds and when to move on from this.

Make practice more fun by incorporating games—see our advice sheet and top tips for working on speech sounds.