



## What is a lisp?

When we talk about a lisp we usually mean that a child pokes their tongue through their teeth when they say the 's' sounds, so in actual fact they are saying 'th'. This type of lisp can be found in typically developing children and is common up until the age of 4 ½ years. There are other types of lisps which are not part of normal developmental. These are sometimes referred to as 'lateral lisps'. In a lateral lisp, you will hear the air escaping out the sides of the tongue. Children who present with a lateral lisp should be referred to a speech and language therapist for an assessment.

## What causes a child to develop a lisp?

There is no known cause of a lisp. Some professionals suggest that excessive or long term use of dummies can encourage overdevelopment of the muscles at the front of the mouth which can lead to a persistent tongue thrust. However, this is not the case for every child who has a lisp.

## My child is 4 years old and has a lisp. Will they need speech and language therapy or will they just grow out of it?

It can be typical for children up to the age of 4 ½ yrs to lisp (not lateral lisp). After this age and depending on the child's motivation and the severity of the lisp, your child may need a bit of help if they have a lisp. This is mainly because they need to re-learn the pattern of where to put their tongue to make the 's' sound and also to hear the differences between the sounds they are making.

Your local speech and language therapist may be able to provide some simple activities to try at home in order to overcome this sound difficulty.

## My child has a lisp, what can I do to help?

There are some things you can try at home to help your child with a lisp:

- Model the right way to say a word when s/he gets it wrong. e.g. if the child says 'I want to wear the blue 'thock'' you can say 'You want the blue 'sock?'. This means that they are hearing the right way to say words. Don't worry if they can't say it back or copy you in the right way yet, they may not be ready.
- Play games like 'I Spy' together, finding things that begin with the 's' sound and the 'th' sound. Talk about the sounds that words begin with so that you are helping them to notice the difference.
- If your child is willing and able, use a mirror to demonstrate how the tongue stays behind the teeth when making a 's' sound
- If a dummy or bottle is being used try to minimise this

You can find more information at the following website:

<http://speech-language-therapy.com/index.php?view=article&id=86:lisp>

## I CAN Help enquiry service

Phone 020 7843 2544 for a free call-back from a speech and language therapist

Email [enquiries@ican.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ican.org.uk) Visit [www.ican.org.uk/help](http://www.ican.org.uk/help)

The Talking Point website is the first stop for information about children's communication. The site has lots of free information and activities, a postcode search of provision and a free progress checker. [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)