

Hand Cues for Speech Sounds

A companion to Dynamic Temporal and Tactile Cueing (DTTC) practice

Helping children see it, hear it, and feel it

What is DTTC?

DTTC is a motor-based treatment approach used for children who have difficulty planning and coordinating the movements needed for speech. The adult provides a model and adjusts the amount of help moment by moment. Practice may move from saying a word together, to immediate imitation, to imitation after a short delay, and finally to independent production.

The goal is not simply to name a sound correctly. The goal is to help the child build a more accurate, consistent movement pattern for meaningful speech.

Where do these hand cues fit?

These hand cues are consistent visual and movement reminders paired with individual speech sounds. They give the child another way to remember how a sound starts, continues, or changes. Encourage the child to make the motor movement while saying the sound. The adult must model both the sound and the hand movement at first so the child can learn the connection. The gestures are supportive cues developed for clinical teaching; they are not a standardized set of DTTC signs and may be adapted by the treating speech-language pathologist.

SEE IT

Watch the adult's face, mouth, and hand gesture. The gesture makes an invisible speech movement easier to notice.

HEAR IT

Pair the gesture with a clear sound model and memorable name: pop, drum, tick-tock, angry dog, and more.

FEEL IT

Notice airflow, vibration, length, rhythm, or body movement. The cue adds a physical memory for the sound.

A simple practice sequence

1. TEACH	The adult says the sound while clearly modeling its hand movement.
2. TOGETHER	The child copies the motor movement while saying the sound with the adult.
3. ADD A WORD	Connect the cue to its place in a word: 'ammmm has the yummy sound at the end.' Say ammmm while sweeping the arm across the chest.
4. VISUAL ONLY	Ask for the word without saying it first. If needed, silently show the hand cue. The child may copy the movement while producing the word.
5. FADE	Make the gesture smaller and then remove it. The goal is correct production without another spoken model or hand cue.

Keep practice successful: Use a few accurate attempts instead of many frustrated repetitions. Model the word if the child does not know it. Follow the child's speech-language pathologist for sound targets and level of support. Do not physically move a child's jaw, lips, or tongue unless you are trained and directed to do so.

Sound Cue Quick Reference

Early sounds and foundational movement cues

Sound	Cue name	Hand movement	Say / notice
/p/	Popping sound	Open and close a hand beside the mouth like a bubble popping.	Short p, p, p. Feel the quick burst of air.
/b/	Bouncing ball	Use the BALL sign: curved hands move slightly together and apart.	Short b, b, b. Add voice and bounce the rhythm.
/m/	Yummy sound	Draw the right arm slowly across the chest to show a long sound.	Mmmmm. Lips stay closed; feel the hum.
/t/	Tick-tock	Move one pointer finger beside the mouth like a clock hand.	Light, quick t, t, t at the front of the mouth.
/d/	Drum sound	Tap an open palm on the table or strike one palm with the other.	D, d, d. Add voice and feel the strong beat.
/n/	No-no nose	Touch one pointer finger to the side of the nose.	Nnnn. Lips open; feel the nasal hum.
/h/	Hot sound	Hold an open palm face-up beneath the mouth and breathe onto it.	H, h, h. Feel warm air with no voice.
/w/	Crying baby	Hold a closed fist beside the eye like a baby crying.	Wa, wa, wa. Round the lips before opening.
/k/	Kicking sound	Palm faces the child's face and waves backward: kick the sound back.	K, k, k. Notice the movement in the back of the mouth.
/g/	Gorilla sound	Thump the upper chest with a closed fist like a playful gorilla.	Guh, guh, guh. Back sound with strong voice.

Sound Cue Quick Reference

Continuous sounds, later sounds, and movement combinations

Sound	Cue name	Hand movement	Say / notice
/f/	Angry cat	Raise a clawed hand and pull it downward while the sound continues.	Fffff. Teeth touch the lower lip; air keeps flowing.
/v/	Motorcycle	Hold imaginary handlebars and twist one wrist to rev the engine.	Vvvvv. Same lip position as /f/, with vibration.
CH	Choo-choo	Reach up and pull an imaginary train-whistle cord straight down.	Ch, ch, ch. A quick stop followed by moving air.
TH	Thinking sound	Tap one pointer finger at the temple while thinking.	Th, th, th. Tongue tip is gently between the teeth.
SH	Be quiet	Hold one pointer finger vertically in front of rounded lips.	Shhhhh. Keep the air flowing quietly.
/s/	Tornado	Circle one pointer finger continuously like a spinning tornado.	Sssss. Teeth stay close; the air flows steadily.
/z/	Buzzing bee	Shake one pointer finger quickly from side to side.	Zzzzz. Same shape as /s/, with noisy vibration.
/j/	Jumping sound	Left palm is flat; right index and middle fingers jump onto it like legs.	J, j, j as in jump or judge. Feel the springy release.
/y/	Yes sound	Make a right-hand Y shape and pull it downward beneath the chin.	Eeeyah. Stretch the glide smoothly into the vowel.
/r/	Angry dog growl	Lift both hands beside the mouth like growling paws.	Rrrrrr. Keep the tongue strong and the growl continuous.

Remember: The hand cue should support the speech movement, not become a requirement. As the child gains control, fade the gesture so the word can be produced naturally in everyday communication.