



Asking About Acoustic Highlighting

What is Acoustic Highlighting?

Acoustic highlighting is a technique used to heighten awareness of specific speech sounds. A sound or a sound in a word or phrase becomes highlighted when it is slightly emphasized. This technique can be used in any spoken language throughout the world.

Children with hearing loss who are learning listening and spoken language may benefit from this method for certain words or speech sounds. Acoustic highlighting can be used in any stage of listening to draw the child's attention to a sound or word. Emphasis on specific sounds may improve your child's auditory awareness and speech production.

You have been using this strategy all of your life. For example, at a party with loud music and conversations, you introduce yourself and say, "My name is Stacey." The person responds, "Hi Tracey." You reply, "Not Tracey – my name is Ssssstacey." The person then says, "Oh, hi Stacey."

By stressing the duration of the /s/ sound you gave specific acoustic information to differentiate between the names Stacey and Tracey. In this situation, the emphasis or highlight on the /s/ helped to identify the word, "Stacey".

Why should I use acoustic highlighting?

As your child's primary conversation partner, you can improve his listening and speech skills through natural interactions. If his teacher or therapist is using acoustic highlighting with him, you can carry the technique into daily experiences. You can use acoustic highlighting to help your child:

- improve listening skills
- hear the difference between speech sounds



- become aware of speech mistakes
- strengthen speech skills
- develop duration, intensity and pitch

How do I use acoustic highlighting?

Say the word in the typical way first to give your child the chance to hear it normally. Then use the word again either in a sentence or by itself. Lean close to his ear, hearing aid or cochlear implant. Place slight emphasis on the word or sound. This may draw your child's auditory attention to that sound. Examples are:

- when your child is working on a specific sound you might emphasize it as an initial speech sound saying yyyyyogurt if you were teaching “y”
- when your baby is learning one of the voiceless sounds you might whisper it to make clearer to your child whispering “ppp-ull” if you were teaching “p”
- when your toddler is learning DIP (Duration, Intensity, Pitch), you might enhance his perception of the sounds within words or phrases saying good MORN-ing or OOO-pen if you were teaching pitch
- To prevent your child from developing unnatural speech patterns use:
 - typical pronunciation of the speech sound without exaggeration
 - natural facial expressions and/or mouth movements
 - a normal tone or soft voice
 - ordinary language (sentence) patterns

Where should I use acoustic highlighting?

This technique can be done anywhere but it will be more helpful in situations where your child can listen and is interested in what you are saying. It should be used when you are focusing on a word or phrase, but not in every conversation. Follow your child’s lead, highlighting a word that he has attempted to use or when the word is part of a topic he wants to talk about with you.

When will I know acoustic highlighting is working?

You may not be able to know immediately if this technique has been useful for your child. Over time you will see if his listening skills are improving. When he accurately repeats the targeted sound, self-corrects or says the emphasized word appropriately without prompts, his progress indicates that highlighting is working.

Children learn language from their families. Conversations that are frequent and fun can encourage speech learning, too. Families may use speech strategies throughout the day to strengthen their child’s listening skills. Parents can choose which methods to use, when and why. Acoustic highlighting is easy and effective. Try it and see how acoustic highlighting may help improve your child’s listening and spoken language.