

What Is a “Lisp?”

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What Is a Lisp?

A “lisp” usually refers to a person’s difficulty producing the /s/ and /z/ sounds because of incorrect tongue placement. The tongue may be sticking out between the front teeth, or the sides of the tongue may not be high enough or tense enough in the mouth. Both of these articulation errors result in sound distortions.

What Is the Difference Between Frontal and Lateral Lisps?

An *interdental (frontal) lisp* occurs when the tongue sticks out between the front teeth. This error makes /s/ and /z/ sound like “th” (e.g., yeth/yes). A *lateral lisp* occurs when air escapes over the sides of the tongue. A lateral lisp often sounds “wet” or “slushy” because you can hear the sounds of saliva.

When Can My Child Begin Treatment?

In young children, a frontal lisp is often a developmental distortion. This means that it may improve on its own as a child develops new sounds. Therefore, a speech-language pathologist may wait to provide intervention for this error until a child is seven or eight years of age. A lateral lisp is not a developmental distortion. Treatment can begin around four and a half years of age for a child with a lateral lisp.

Tips for Intervention

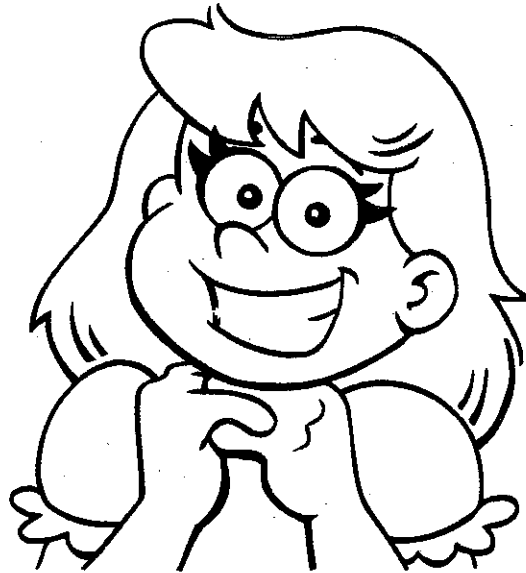
Following are simple strategies to help a child with a lisp produce /s/ and /z/ sounds:

Frontal Lisp

- One of the easiest methods is to tell the child to “Bite, smile, and blow” (Marshalla, 2007, p. 102). This can help the child learn to keep the tongue behind the teeth.
- Ask the child to say the /t/ sound and hold that sound, and then “blow more air through the /t/ in order to produce a ‘Long T’” (Marshalla, 2007, p. 103). This helps the child find where to place the tongue for the /s/ and /z/ sounds and say an approximation of /s/.
- Have the child say the sounds “th-s-th-s-th-s-th-s...” in one long breath to increase awareness of the tongue tip and its placement (Marshalla, 2007, p. 104).

Lateral lisp

- Have the child hold a feather, strip of paper, or finger in front of the center of the mouth and try to blow air through the front of the mouth while lowering the tongue tip slightly (Secord, Boyce, Donohue, Fox, & Shine, 2007, p. 38).
- Have the child place a straw between his/her teeth and direct the air stream through the straw (Secord et. al, 2007, p. 38).
- Instruct the child to make rapid productions of /t/ and prolong the last one into an /s/ (... t, t, t, t, t, t, t, t, tssss...).
- Have the child pretend to pull a piece of string out of his/her mouth while producing /s/ to direct airflow through the front of the mouth.



Resources

Marshalla, P. (2007). *Frontal lisp, lateral lisp*. Mill Creek, WA: Marshalla Speech and Language.

Secord, W. A., Boyce, S. E., Donohue, J. S., Fox, R. A., & Shine, R. E. (2007). *Eliciting sounds* (2nd ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.