

# Good & Not So Good Sounds

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Let's think about the soup of sound around us. The TV is on in the other room. Someone just started the dishwasher. The fan was left on in the bathroom. Noise is a soup. Even small sounds can add to it and make it difficult to hear the words spoken in it. Noises that we as adults can easily "tune out" might just rob your child of a language learning chance. As children are developing listening and language skills, they do best in places where the words spoken are at least 20 decibels louder than the noise around them. Children with hearing loss are even more affected, of course, by the presence of noise and distance away from the speaker. Since everyday noises are easily dismissed by our adult language mastered brains we tend to not appreciate the effect these noises can have on little ears.

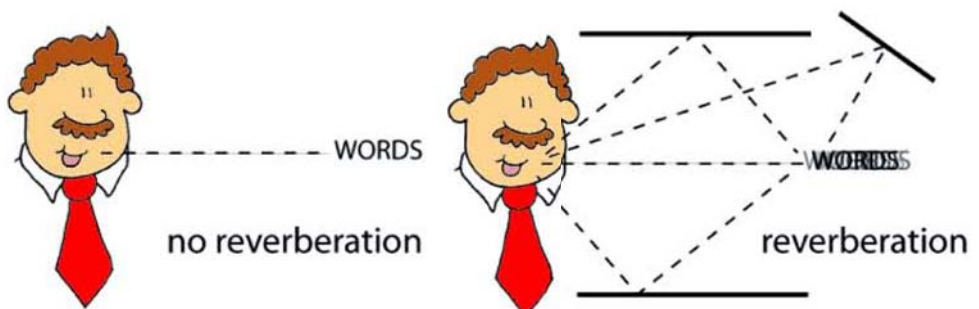


Be careful about the amount of sounds in your home. Run the dishwasher at night while little listeners are sleeping. Don't have the TV on all the time - especially when no one is watching! Air conditioners, fish tanks and fans shouldn't be in places where you'll be doing a lot of talking and listening (the kitchen table, bedtime, play areas, etc.). Keep doors to other rooms shut. Line those doors with weather stripping if sound still comes through. Caulking windows may also help quiet your home. Let's consider just one thing a child has to learn in the great tapestry of language learning ahead. When we talk about a book we mean one. When we say books we mean more than one. For a child to learn to put that tiny little "s" sound on the end, he has to hear it used meaningfully with different words over and over again, so that he can learn that rule. "Where is your meep?" "Go get me all of the meeps". If noise covers up that tiny sound, so that sometimes he hears it used when we mean "more than one" and sometimes it is gone due to noise (or distance) then what is the rule? It is much harder to learn these language rules when noise makes the rules hard to hear and even inconsistent.

Get closer. Move in and talk with your child about what he sees. By getting closer you naturally help your words win over the noises that compete. Talk naturally. Don't talk in a loud voice. The increase in volume actually comes through in the vowels, which can drown out those softer consonant sounds we want to hear as well. Just talk in a natural way at a normal volume. If your child wears an FM/Roger system, use it. With this system your voice will sound like you are right next to him no matter how far away he gets.

## reverberation

when speech echos back to the listener's ear off of hard surfaces in the room at slightly different arrival times, the signal can be distorted



Sounds bounce. Your voice travels out from your mouth in all directions. One path goes straight to your child's ear. Another path travels to a hard flat surface like a window and bounces. One path of this bounce arrives at your child's ear just milliseconds behind the original path. This blurs the sound like nothing else. Think of the echo in a gymnasium. Now think of sound in a carpeted library. The library is better. Any flat hard surface can help to distort the sounds your child needs to hear in order to develop language. Help him to make the most of what you tell him. You can do this in part by closing curtains (to cover hard flat windows) and using carpeting when you can. Cover tables with table cloths. This helps cut down on the clatter of objects on them too.

When you look ahead to places your child will be where he has to listen in noise, prepare him by pre-teaching. Pre-teaching the things your child will hear and overlearning the story or the topic is effective because your child will have knowledge of the phrases and words that might be said. If noise, distance, or reverberation (sound bounce) combine to make him lose part of what he hears, your child will be able to "fill in" what he missed with what he already knows. In quiet pre-teach the names of children in his preschool. Play at home and pretend you are at school. Use the words, directions and activities that will be said at school. Store, haircut, McDonald's and any other pretend play helps get your child ready for listening to what might be said to him in the noise of the real event. If your child is in sports, pre-teach the game and the concepts by playing miniature version on a table or by playing a mini game in the backyard. Get a book (even a coloring book can help) of the movie you are going to see. Act it out with action figures. Use the FM/Roger system whenever noise or distance is a concern. Insist that others wear the FM/Roger transmitter if your child can be helped by them wearing it (eg. story time at the library).

In the soup of sound around us, do whatever you can to help to make the meatballs (your words) stand out from the broth (noise). Listening should be fun and easy.

