



## For Partners: Supporting Speech Therapy at Home

### Practicing Speech at Home

Children born with a cleft palate often require speech therapy to correct the way that they articulate sounds or place their tongue within their mouths while speaking. Trained speech professionals are essential for guiding a child through such therapy. Smile Train is dedicated to finding ways for children born with cleft palate to access and succeed in therapy, even if they are unable to travel to a center and receive in-person care from a speech professional. The following resources are recommendations on how to connect children to home-based cleft palate speech therapy activities.

### Telehealth Services

For Smile Train partners that already have active speech programs, Smile Train is supporting their efforts to offer services to their patients through technology such as mobile phones, tablets or computers. This can be done through programs such as Whatsapp, Skype, Zoom, etc. For more information on how to receive this support please contact your local Smile Train manager or [partner@smiletrain.org](mailto:partner@smiletrain.org).

### Smile Train Speech App

Smile Train has developed a free, interactive application ([IOS and Android](#)) for children with cleft palate to practice their speech on a phone or tablet. The app involves digital stories and games that target sounds usually challenging for children born with a cleft palate. It also has notes and video tutorials for caregivers to understand what is happening with their child's speech and how to help them overcome their speech challenges. The app is ideally used under the guidance of a trained speech professional so the caregiver and child know which stories and games to target first. For more information and instructions on how to download the app, visit <https://www.smiletrain.org/our-cause/our-model/apps>.

### Leaders Project, Teachers College – Columbia University

Dr Catherine Crowley, one of Smile Train's [Global Medical Advisory Board](#) members, has developed hundreds of resources for therapists, caregivers, and children born with cleft palate across 10+ languages (including but not limited to: English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, Hindi, Twi, Igbo, Portuguese, Amharic and Shona). The resources are offered for free at the site [www.leadersproject.org](http://www.leadersproject.org). The following instructions are about how to best utilize these resources to provide effective therapy at home:

#### Assessing a Child's Speech

Before any games or stories are offered to children, therapists or caregivers must assess their child's speech to determine which sounds are problematic and need to be targeted for therapy.

<https://www.leadersproject.org/category/all-menus/cleft-palate/cleft-palate-assessment-screeners/>

## Cleft Palate Speech Hierarchy

Once their problematic sounds are identified, children must be guided on how to discriminate the sound, create the sound, and then repeat the sound as a syllable and then in a word that he/she is having trouble with. This process is called [Cleft Palate Speech Hierarchy](#).

## Sound Discrimination

Before children can change the place of articulation of speech sounds, they must be able to hear the difference (auditory discrimination). [This illustration](#) gives children a fun way to learn the discriminate between sounds made in the throat, mouth and nose. Strategies to stimulate sounds are found [here](#).

## Word Level – Game Boards

These Game Boards focus on acquisition of high pressure sounds at the **word level**. Each word game offers the opportunity to practice 1 – 2 sounds in a variety of locally appropriate words over 100 times each time the game is played. There are games available for most high pressure sounds across many languages and a video to explain how to play is [here](#).

To play the game, a die and a token to move across the board (ie, rock, coin). The child repeats the words aloud as the token moves across the board.

## Word & Sentence Level - Story Books

These therapy materials focus on acquisition of high pressure sounds at the **word and sentence level**. Each book targets 1 or 2 high pressure oral sounds at a time. They purposefully eliminate other sounds that can be challenging to those with cleft palate speech. It offers many opportunities for the child to repeat the sound he/she is working on.

A complete list of books by language and sound can be found at [www.leadersproject.org](http://www.leadersproject.org)

For additional fun at home, these books have also been made into coloring books and are posted on Smile Train's website.

## Strategies Before Cleft Palate Surgery

When possible, cleft palates are generally closed for the first time when the baby is between 6 and 14 months old. Sometimes it takes longer when the baby is not healthy or big enough, or the family is waiting for a surgery. [Here](#) are strategies parents and professionals can do before the cleft palate is repaired to make sure the baby has correct articulation placement—that is so the speech sounds are created with the correct tongue and lip placement.

## Training Resources

To increase access to therapy for these children, Dr Crowley has also led the development of training resources for people interested in learning how to provide speech therapy. These can be utilized by caregivers at home so they are best equipped to support their children. An [online course is available](#), as well as downloaded resources in a "[Train the Trainer](#)" format so that local experts can offer the training locally. For more information please contact [info@smiletrain.org](mailto:info@smiletrain.org).