

Core Vocabulary Intervention – How to do it

The following information provides a description of how to implement the core vocabulary approach. We describe the model (e.g. service delivery, techniques) that we have found effective.

How often should therapy happen?

Two 30-minute treatment sessions each week. This is the service delivery model that we use. However, core vocabulary has been implemented successfully with once-weekly sessions.

How long should the approach be implemented?

Six to eight weeks (or what equates to 6-8 hours), should be sufficient time to establish consistency of production for most children.

Agent of therapy?

The speech language pathologist is the primary agent of therapy. Parents also play an important role in therapy as they are asked follow up at home with daily practise of the target words. Teachers also need to be aware of the target words so they can reinforce correct productions at school.

How many target words?

This will depend on the child. We have found that 10 per week are a good number for preschool and school aged children. Smaller sets of target words have been used for younger children, or children with special needs.

What are the goals of intervention?

Ultimate goal of intervention: Intelligible speech.

Long-term goal: The child will produce at least 50 target words consistently i.e. produce a word exactly the same way each time it is produced.

Short-term goals: Target specific. The child should achieve an appropriate productive realisation of each target based on their phonological system and phonetic inventory (i.e. 'best production', and consistently use the established 'best production').

First session (based on a 2 session per week model)

The first session is used to select a set of treatment words and establish the child's best production of the words.

1. Child randomly selects the week's targets (pictures or word cards).
2. The clinician teaches the child the target words. This can be achieved by teaching the word sound-by-sound, using cues such as syllable segmentation, imitation and cued articulation as outlined in Passy (1990). For example: to teach 'thank you', the clinician might say: "thank you has two syllables – [θæŋk] and [ju]. The first syllable [θæŋk] has four sounds: /θ/, /æ/, /ŋ/ and /k/. Start with your tongue between your teeth for /θ/. You try it - /θ/". Give the child feedback. Build the word in this way and then get the child to blend the parts.

For some children, a highly effective technique is to link sounds to letters. Children with inconsistent speech disorder are usually able to imitate all sounds. If it is not possible to elicit a correct production then the best production may include developmental errors. (e.g. [dæŋkju] for thank you). It is important to emphasise that you want the child to say the word exactly the same way each time they attempt to say it, not achieving error-free production.

Second session

The second session is used to elicit a high number of productions of the target words (150+ in a 30 minute session). Games are used to elicit a high number of repetitions. Any game that the child is highly motivated to participate in can be used to elicit productions. We have put together some ideas that have worked in therapy (see game resources).

Providing feedback

When the child makes an error the feedback should be explicit – what went wrong and how they can fix it. Try to avoid simply asking the child to imitate the target word since imitation provides a phonological plan that inconsistent children can use without having to generate their own plan for the word. An information sheet on giving feedback for parents is provided.

Moving on to new target words

Towards the end of the second session or at the beginning of the session at the start of the week, the child is asked to produce the set of target words that have been the focus of therapy for the past week three times. Any word that the child can produce consistently is removed from the list of words to be learned. Words produced inconsistently remain on the list (go back in the bag of words yet to be learned). Even though there is 50 target words (core vocabulary) 6-8 weeks of intervention is recommended. This means that words that have not been mastered can be retargeted in another week.

Generalisation

Core vocabulary intervention aims to stabilise a child's system resulting in consistent productions. The therapy would not be beneficial if the effect of therapy was limited to the treated target items. To monitor generalisation a set of untreated items (10 words) is provided. Information of measuring efficacy is also provided.

What to do when the child's speech is consistent

Core vocabulary intervention will increase the consistency of a child's speech production. The effect this has on the child's speech system can vary. For some children, more than one intervention approach may be necessary to achieve age-appropriate speech. For example, Dodd & Bradford (2000) report a case study of a boy with inconsistent speech production. Once consistency was established he benefited from phonological contrast therapy that targeted his remaining developmental error patterns.