



## The Tongue, The Cup and The Straw!

If your child is attending speech & language therapy, then your child probably exhibits delayed communication skills. In addition, they may also have feeding and speaking difficulties, as a result of weakness in the strength and coordination of the lips, jaw and tongue. If your child over the age of 2 years old and has these presenting behaviors, it is highly recommended that bottle and pacifier use be discontinued.

Prolonged use of the pacifier and bottle can cause structural differences to the oral mechanism which includes a heightened palate, flared teeth, weak resting posture for the lips and tongue. It strengthens the immature pattern of the tongue moving forward and backward. It may contribute to your child's open mouth posture and a flat tongue that sits in a forward position at rest. Old habits such as the sucking behavior of the tongue are difficult to extinguish and be replaced with new skills when a bottle or pacifier is introduced daily.

In addition, weak muscles may interfere with sequencing sounds for connected speech. Some speech goals are directed towards increasing awareness and points of contact for the production of consonants. Your child needs good muscle tone in the tongue. Back tongue muscles are needed for production of "k", "g" and "ng". Elevation of the sides of the tongue is needed for palatal sounds, "ch", "sh", "j" and alveolar sounds, "s", "z". Extended use and sucking of a pacifier/bottle may hinder the development of such muscles. Plus, continued use interferes with therapy and progress. The use of a straw or rounded spout facilitates tongue retraction, tone and back muscles of the tongue. By using a cup and straw, children learn to use and coordinate their tongue, lips, jaw and cheeks. Change the width and length of the straw to promote awareness and stimulate lip closure and lip strengthening. Longer straws and thicker liquids, like shakes or pudding, require more strength and muscle stamina than a shorter straw. Try them both.

### **SIPPY CUP WARNING!!**

Please AVOID buying and using the sippy cups that feature a flattened spout with two small holes. This type of spout requires intense sucking, which is the behavior we wish to avoid. There are many companies such as Playtex, Tupperware and Rubbermaid that produce a non-spillable cup with a rounded spout. Please purchase one of those to help facilitate oral motor skills for drinking. The proper cup use can help strengthen weak muscles. Practice with your child using the new cup. The bathtub is a great place to introduce the cup without a lid. Have fun!