

**Disclaimer: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.**

## Making faces to support oral motor development

### Learning aims

- Develop increased awareness, strength, co-ordination and movement of the mouth
- Develop fine motor skills related to the face, lips, tongue and jaw
- Begin to improve or develop pronunciation of sounds typical for age or stage of development.



### Resources

- Handheld, unbreakable mirrors
- Hand-puppet, with tongue (if desired).

### Activity outline

- Introduce babies to mirrors at an early stage, positioned so that they can see themselves and you in the mirror. Make basic mouth movements such as opening your mouth wide, sticking out your tongue or smiling. Remember to wait for the baby to notice, process and respond before changing your facial expression
- Have handheld unbreakable mirrors available in the continuous provision and make time to share these with the children, so they are looking at and copying facial expressions regularly
- Use the puppet to encourage children to engage with the activities. Children may copy the puppet when it is used by the adult or they may like to take control of the puppet, telling their peers which faces to pull
- When children are able, increase the range of mouth movements to include:
  - Showing teeth with teeth together
  - Showing teeth with mouth open (pulling lips back)
  - Poking out the tip of the tongue between closed lips
  - Sticking out the full tongue straight in front
  - Sticking out the full tongue as far down the chin as possible
  - Sticking out the full tongue as far up towards the nose as possible
  - Licking top lip from right to left, left to right
  - Licking bottom lip from right to left, left to right
  - Poking the tongue into the right or left cheek to make it bulge out
  - Pucker lips together into a 'kiss' face

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- Pucker lips together and open mouth to make a 'fish' face
- Puff out right cheek, left cheek
- Stick out the bottom lip as far as it will go (pushing the bottom jaw forward)
- Move the bottom jaw from right to left.
- As children develop their oral motor skills, add sounds which encourage the tongue, teeth and lips to work together, such as making 'ttttt' sounds while showing their teeth together, blowing raspberries with a kiss face, slurping sounds while licking lips and so on
- When modelling new sounds for children, encourage them to look at your mouth so they can watch what you do. Talk about the parts of the mouth with children, such as asking them to put their tongue to the back of their mouth to make a 'c' sound or their teeth together to make a 't' sound
- Children find making sounds with the front of their mouth difficult when they are used to having a dummy while talking. See our top tips for supporting parents with managing dummy use.

### **Extending the activity**

- Use straws in watery paint and washing up liquid to encourage blowing bubbles. Curly or long straws make the muscles work harder and thicker paint will make the task even harder (remember to check the children know how to blow through a straw prior to adding it to the paint)
- Use party blowers as extra long lizard tongues. Children lie down on their tummies and use the party blower to knock down small figures in front of them. The further away the figures the harder they have to blow.

### **NDNA products to support you with this activity**

- [Publication - The developing child: Super skills for learning](#)
- [Online training - Speech and language skills](#)
- [Live virtual classroom training – Communication and interaction](#)
- [Webinar - Early Language Development – Supporting Disadvantaged Children](#)