



Minimal Pairs Therapy

Children need to be able to hear the differences between sounds in order for them to say the words clearly. Supporting your child's ability to listen really carefully to sounds is a great way to help with their talking. One way we can do this is with minimal pair therapy. A minimal pair is a **pair of words that vary by only a single sound**. In speech therapy, the differing sounds are usually the sound your child is struggling with, paired with the sound your child is saying instead. For example:

Target word	Your child's pronunciation	Example minimal pairs to practice
Key	Tea	Key/Tea Car/Tar Coffee/Toffee
Sock	Tock	Sew/Toe Sue/Two Sea/Tea
Pea	Bee	Pea/Bee Park/Bark Pie/Bye

Minimal pairs can be used in lots of different ways to help your child with their speech.

Games to play with minimal pairs to help with listening

- Stampers/counters
 - Lay one set of minimal pairs on a table e.g. key versus tea
 - Give your child a stamper/counter
 - Ask your child to randomly put a stamper/counter on either key or tea.
 - Do this up to 10 times e.g. key, key, key, tea, tea, key and so on
 - If your child is struggling to hear the difference and is choosing the wrong ones, give them some clues e.g. mouth open really wide to show the k sound and say it repeatedly.

- Lego towers
 - Lay one set of minimal pairs on a table e.g. key versus tea
 - Put a Lego piece by each card to start building the tower
 - Ask your child to randomly add a Lego piece to either key or tea tower.
 - Do this up to 10 times e.g. key, key, key, tea, tea, key and so on and see which tower is the highest.
 - If your child is struggling to hear the difference and is choosing the wrong ones, give them some clues e.g. mouth open really wide to show the k sound and say it repeatedly.

- Post box (made from a shoe box or a toy box)
 - Lay several sets of the minimal pairs out on the table
 - Ask your child to post different picture cards e.g. post key, post tea, post coffee, post toffee etc until all of the pictures have gone.
 - If your child is struggling to hear the difference and is choosing the wrong ones, give them some clues e.g. mouth open really wide to show the k sound and say it repeatedly.
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Games to play with minimal pairs to help with talking

Only play these games when your child can hear the differences between the sounds (the games above) **and** can say both of the words in the pair e.g. key and tea. These games help your child realise that saying the two words in **exactly** the same way affects the meaning of their message.

- Secret messages/barrier games
 - Select one minimal pair only (e.g. key / tea)
 - Cut out six pictures of each pair (e.g. 6 key pictures and 6 tea pictures)
 - Lay all the pictures face up on the table
 - Player 1 closes their eyes whilst the player 2 picks up picture
 - Player 2 names their picture and player 1 has to open their eyes and find the picture player 2 named from the remaining cards on the table
 - Once player 1 has picked the picture player 2 shows their picture and the players see whether the pictures match e.g. key and key or if there is a mismatch. So the child says tea, but has a picture of key and the other player has the tea picture as that's what they heard.
 - Take turns at players closing their eyes, whilst the other player picks the picture and then checking they match.

- In this game when a child mispronounces a word, they are given immediate visual feedback about how successful they were in getting their message across e.g. the pictures do not match.
- They can see if there is a mismatch there are implications for the listener.
- Your child will usually do their best to help the listener to 'get it right' and, in doing this, change their own production of the word.
- See the website for a demonstration of this game.