Speech Sound Therapy

Using Minimal Pairs

What are sound minimal pairs?

- Word pairs that only have one sound difference which changes the word's meaning e.g. 'tea' vs. 'see' or 'bat' vs. 'back'.

Why do we use them in speech and language sessions?

- Some children with speech sound difficulties find it difficult to hear and process the difference between these pairs and therefore do not mark them in their speech. This skill is known as 'auditory discrimination', where children listen to and identify the differences in sounds and words.
- By playing listening games in therapy, we can help children to hear and process these subtle sound differences.
- It is important to build children's listening skills before we word on saying sounds.

How to use minimal pairs at home

- Select a pair of words based on the error your child has made (e.g. if they say 'tea' for 'key' chose /t/ vs. /k/ words. Cover the written words (if children read these, it gives them a big clue!)
- Ask your child to listen as you say one of the words. Get them to show you which one you said by pointing/placing a counter/ running to the word.
- If they chose the wrong one, say "That's a ____, I said ____, let's try that one again".
- If they still find it difficult, get them to look at your mouth while you say the word for a visual clue, or use a Cued Articulation Sound (if they have been using these in sessions) to support your sounds.
- If your child is consistent at finding the correct word and has been working on saying the target sounds in sessions, you can let them be the 'teacher' and ask you to find the right word.
- Point to the words they say, not the word you think they mean.
- E.g. if they said 'bat' (in bat vs cat) but meant 'cat', point to the bat. If they say it was the wrong one, say 'I heard bat' and support them to produce the other sound.

Top tips for speech discrimination activities:

- Practise them in a quiet environment. Too much background noise can make it even more difficult for children to listen to and discriminate sounds.
- Provide lots of clear repetitions of the words you are working on.
- Avoid 'correcting' your child if they still say the word incorrectly. The focus here is on listening and identifying the correct word. Even if they are able to identify the correct word, they may still need further help to say the sounds accurately.
- Make activities fun! You can play games like bingo or make it more active and run or jump or words you say!