

Ryan Corrects R in 10 Months (and also becomes unbeatable at checkers)

Ryan was referred to me for speech therapy to correct the R sound when he was 8 years old. He had a mild learning disability, ADHD and a history of phonological disorder and childhood apraxia of speech.

I will never forget the first day I saw Ryan for therapy. After meeting me and getting seated at my therapy table, he immediately said “What games do you have?” Before I could blink my eyes he had jumped up from the table and was rummaging around in my cabinets looking for games. After redirecting Ryan back to the therapy table, I firmly, but kindly, let him know that we play games in here only after we have completed some work. He looked distressed at this prospect, so I told him I had a special computer program called **Let’s Learn R** that would help make the work fun.

I then engaged Ryan in a short conversation and we completed a standardized articulation test. This allowed me to determine that Ryan’s only speech errors were on the R sound. He made /w/ for /r/ substitutions and had pervasive distortions on R-colored vowels (Vocalic R sounds). I then administered the **Deep R Probe**, which is an on-screen deep test of R. This took about 10 minutes. To conclude the therapy session, we looked together in my cabinet for possible games that Ryan might want to play in the future. As it turned out the only game that interested him was checkers.

Before Ryan returned for his next therapy session, I printed out his results from the **Deep R Probe** and reviewed it. Of the nine variations of R presented in the Probe, Ryan had produced 30% of the AR words correctly and 10% of the AIR words correctly. He scored 0% for Beginning R, R blends 1 (gr, kr, dr, tr), R-blends 2 (fr, br, pr), ER, er, IRE, EAR and OR. This indicated to me that AR might be a good place to start training.

When Ryan returned for his next therapy session, he seemed anxious and wanted to know if we could play checkers yet. I reminded him that we had some work to do first. We started by looking in the mirror together. I had him watch my mouth as I said AR slowly. He was able to imitate the mouth movement and produce a clear, beautiful AR sound! I then probed to see if he could imitate syllables with AR sound, such as BAR, FAR, and MAR. Ryan had a good ear for AR sound and was successful.

Because Ryan was stimuable for AR at the syllable level, this indicated to me that he was ready to start training with **Let’s Learn R**. So I sat next to Ryan in front of the computer and started the **Let’s Learn R Vocalic R-1** program (which contains the AR speech targets). First we viewed the opening sequence and then I located and opened the Practice Session for AR sound at the Syllable

level. As we worked through the practice session, I provided extra auditory bombardment of the speech targets by repeating many of the speech targets close to Ryan's ear in an exaggerated way. When he produced a syllable correctly, I gave positive feedback. When he produced a syllable incorrectly, I used the pause button to stop the program and worked with Ryan face to face to elicit the correct sound. I also jotted down ones and zeros on a piece of paper to keep track of his accuracy level. I noticed that his rate of accuracy increased from 80% during the first activity to 100% accuracy during the last activity. I also noticed that the program captured his interest, focused his attention and kept him working at an intense level of frequency.

After completing the practice session, I pulled out a copy of the Practice Printout sheet for AR syllables and let Ryan demonstrate how well he could independently say the syllables we had worked on. Since he did so with 90% accuracy, the practice printout sheet was placed in his home practice notebook. Finally Ryan had earned the right to play a game of checkers. During the game we each said an AR syllable each time we moved a checkers piece so Ryan continued to practice saying AR syllables. The session ended happily for me, since Ryan had produced well over 200 correct AR syllables and happily for Ryan, as he had won the checkers game (I must admit, I let him win).

For the next 4 months our once weekly 30 minute therapy sessions followed the same routine: 5 minutes of prep time, 15 minutes of training on **Let's Learn R** and/or the **Recording Studio for R** software programs, 5 minutes of playing checkers, and 5 minutes of updating Ryan's home practice notebook. During prep time, I used the Practice Printout sheets to probe for carryover of the last week's goals and to determine the next step in therapy. In four months time, Ryan had completed all Practice Sessions successfully in Let's Learn R for AR , Beginning R and R-blends and was demonstrating good carryover to spontaneous speech for those sounds.

I re-administered the **Deep R Probe** and Ryan's R profile now looked like this: Beginning R: 100%, R blends 1(go, or, dry, try): 100%, R-blends 2 (fro, bra, pr): 100%, AR: 100%, AIR: 40%, EAR: 30%, IRE: 35%, ER: 0%, err: 0%, OR: 0%.

During the next 2 months of therapy, Ryan concentrated on mastering AIR, IRE, and EAR. Because Ryan was able to, we tended to mix our training on these three sounds. During prep time we drilled sequences of vowels plus ER, such as A-ER, I-ER and EE-ER, elongating and separating the sounds. This not only helped to strengthen Ryan's production of AIR, IRE and EAR, but was also preparing him for ER. During this period of training we alternated between working on the **Let's Learn R** and **Recording Studio for R** programs and playing card games for AIR, IRE and EAR.

At the end of Ryan's 6th month of therapy he was demonstrating 60% correct R in his spontaneous speech and had become stimulable for ER. For the next two months we went back to a strict schedule with the **Let's Learn R** and **Recording Studio for R** programs and completed the Practice Sessions for both ER (stressed ER) and er (unstressed ER). At the end of the 8th month, I re-administered the **Deep R Probe**. Ryan now produced all variations of R on the Deep R Probe with 100% accuracy, except for OR, which was still at 0%.

For most of the next month, we concentrated for the first 10 minutes on production of OR, working carefully in front of a mirror. I filled in the rest of the session with card games to reinforce the variations of R that Ryan could already produce correctly. When he could consistently produce a clear OR, we went back to the **Let's Learn R** and **Recording Studio for R** programs to complete the Practice sessions for OR. Ryan still chose to play checkers for the last 5 minutes of each session and was always willing to practice his speech targets while playing. However, he was now asking me to "play hard" and I was truly trying my best, but he still continued to win all the checkers games.

After 9 months Ryan had completed the **Let's Learn R** program and was demonstrating 90% correct R production in his spontaneous speech. We spent the last month of therapy having him read out loud from books and playing games that require talking in sentences. Ryan also worked specifically on producing words like "girl," "twirl," and "squirrel," which were difficult for him. One day he came in and said "I can say them now!" Soon after, his mother reported that both she and Ryan's teacher at school now noticed that Ryan's speech sounded very clear.

Ryan was discharged from R therapy after 10 months. Ryan had been in therapy since age 3 and was very proud of himself for graduating from speech. **Let's Learn R** added a structure and organization to Ryan's therapy program that helped him succeed. I think this distractible child would have been in therapy for a much longer time if it had not been for the **Let's Learn R** program.

A few months later Ryan's mother called to say that his speech continued to sound great. Oh, and by the way, she also said that Ryan won his school's checkers championship!!!

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