

## Helping children with s-clusters

S-clusters are made up of an 's' sound and another consonant sound. There are also called 's blends'. We have 7 s-clusters **sp, st, sm, sw, sc, sl, sn**.

We use s-clusters at the beginning of words like **spoon, smile** and **swim**. They are also in the middle and end of words like **whisper, biscuit, mask** and **fast**.

Children start to say these sounds at 4-5 years. Children often miss off one of the sounds in the cluster.

If they miss the 's' sound words like

- **spoon** become **poon**
- **school** may be **chool**.

If they miss the second consonant sound words like

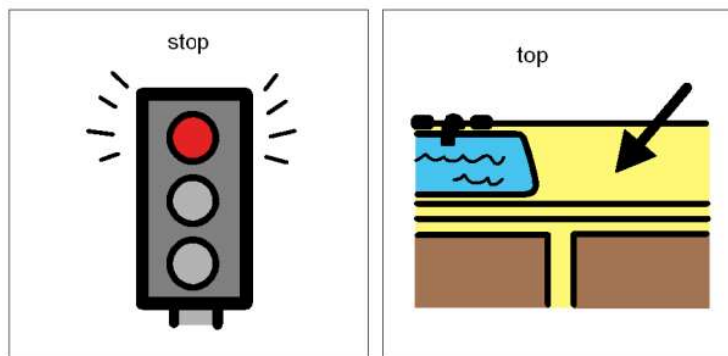
- **star** is **sar**
- **slide** is **side**.

It is very common for children to miss one sound, the best thing to do is model words back when they are not clear.

We start practising s-clusters at around 7 years old. This is because it can take children a while to say their s-cluster sounds clearly.

### Working on s-clusters – Listening work

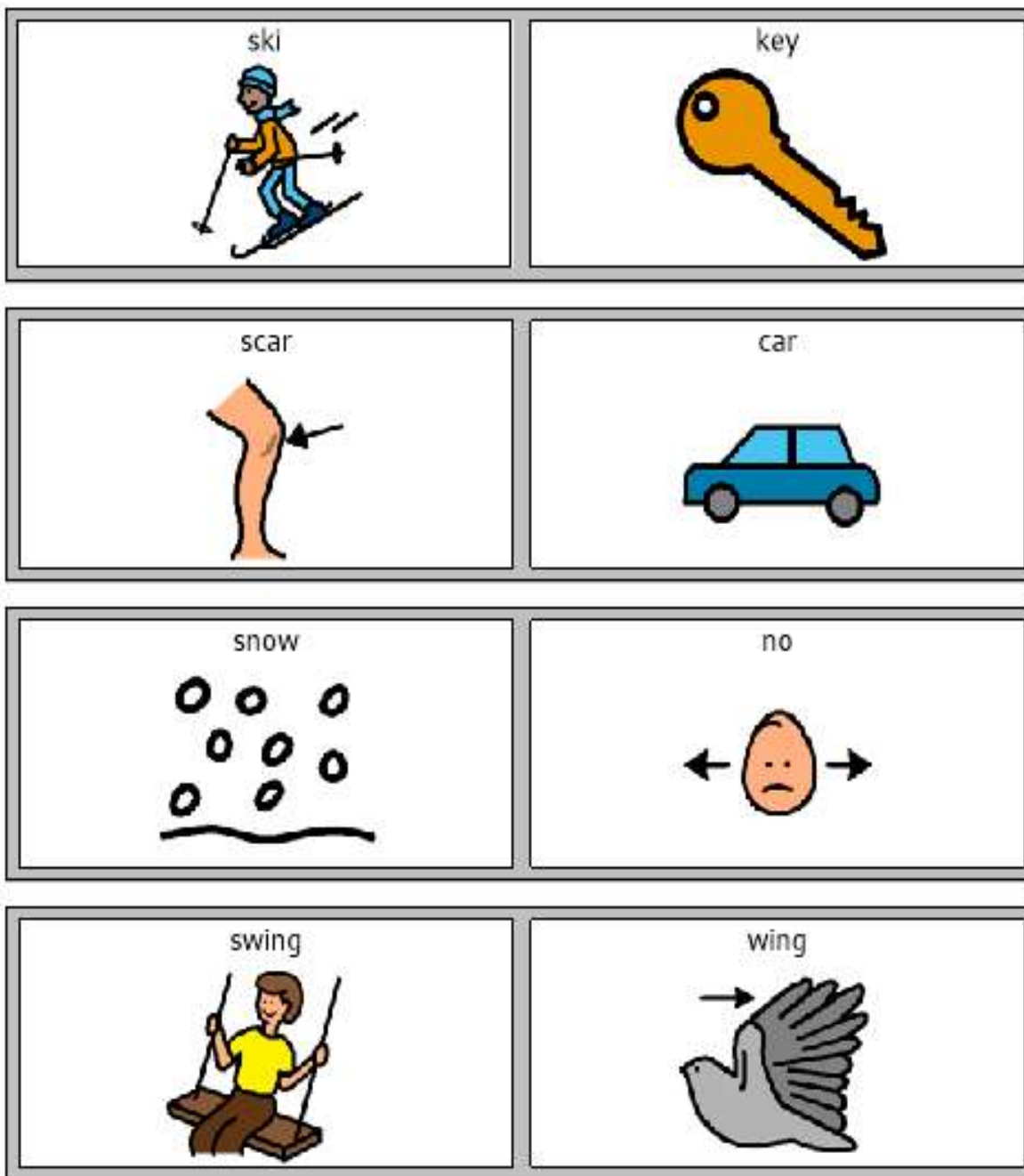
You can start helping your child to say s-clusters by doing listening work. Minimal pairs are a good place to start. Minimal pairs are two words with one sound difference between them for example: **school/cool, stop/top, swing/sing**.

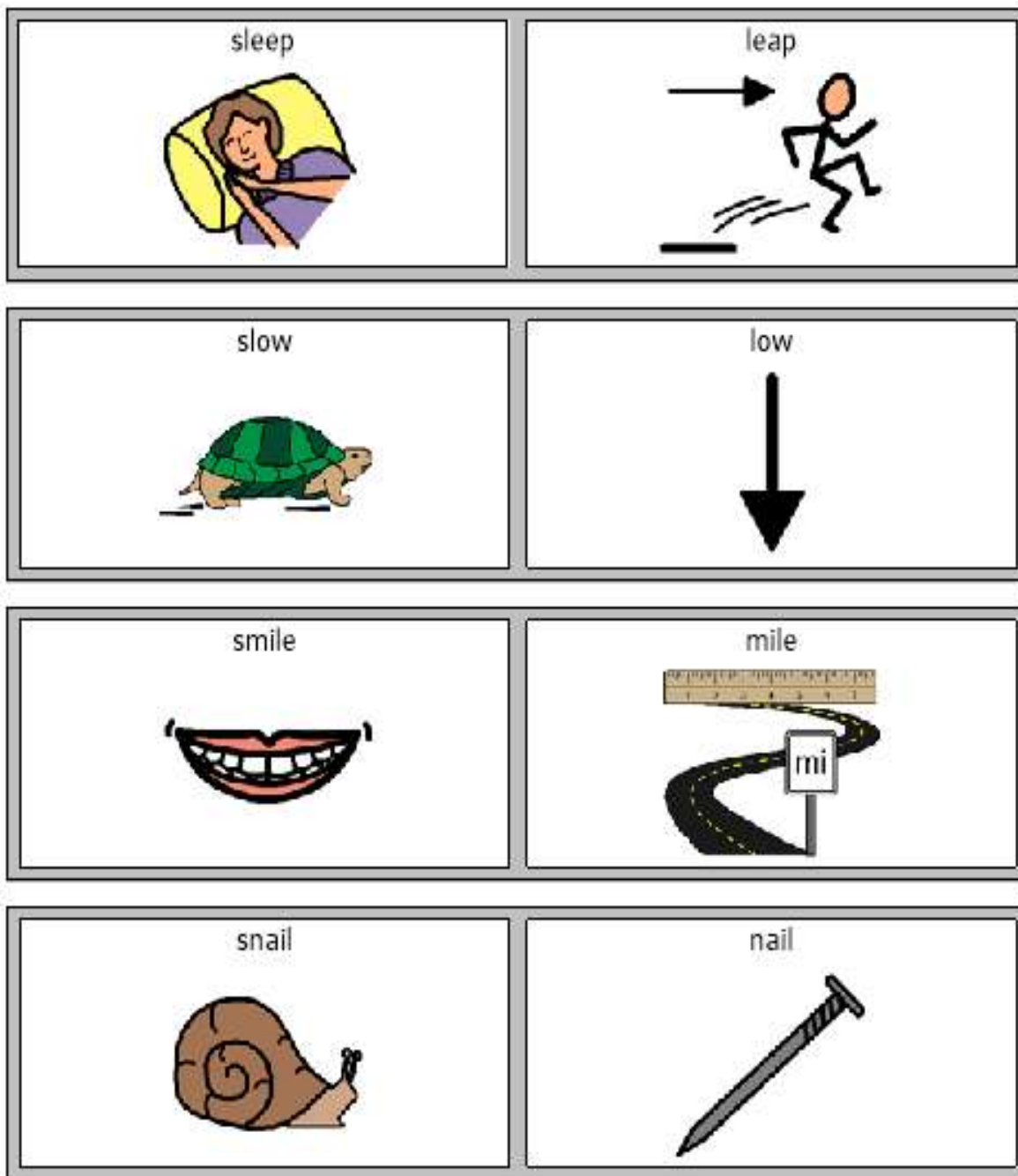


- Use one pair of pictures at a time.
- Check they know what the pictures are.
- Ask your child to point to the picture they hear.
- It helps children when you say "listen really carefully which word am I saying... I might try and catch you out"

**Minimal pairs**

|                                                                                                  |                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>spin</p>     | <p>pin</p>    |
| <p>spot</p>    | <p>pot</p>   |
| <p>star</p>   | <p>tar</p>  |
| <p>stool</p>  | <p>tool</p>  |





### Working on s-clusters – saying the sounds

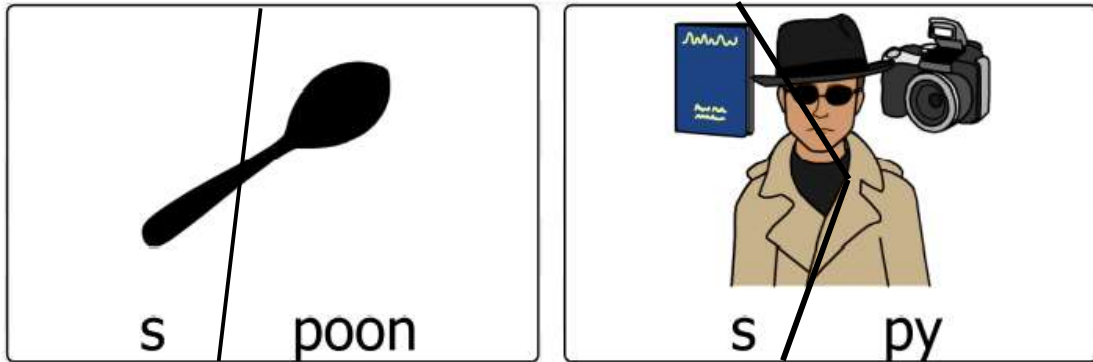
When your child has done listening work, you can start to practise saying s-clusters. Work on one s-cluster at a time, **sp** or **st** are often the best ones to start with.

We build up to a word step-by-step. We start with saying:

- the s-cluster on its own,
- then with a vowel
- then at the start of a word.
- Watch our [s cluster](#) video on our channel.

It helps to get your child to say a longer 'ssssss' sound when practising s-clusters.

Using 2 part jigsaws can be fun to introduce practise with words. The first piece is the 's' sound and the second piece is the rest of the word.



You can make your own jigsaws with the written word under a picture. Cut after the 's' sound so that you have 2 pieces.

When your child can say an 's' cluster at the start of the word you can try adding another word, for example **big spoon**, **red spot**. Watch our [speech steps video](#) to help your child say their s-cluster sounds when using more language.

Keep practice fun, give lots of praise and model back words when they are not clear.

You can find lots of [s-cluster pictures](#) on the toolkit of our website to help practice too.