

Speech sound development

Speech sound development is a complex process starting before a child uses words and can take time to develop.

When children begin to talk it may be hard for others to understand which can be frustrating.

Sounds follow a developmental pattern. As some children are late walkers some will be late talkers - so there are no rigid boundaries. Some children will follow the same pattern but at a later age.

Babbled sounds develop into attempts at real words. Vowel sounds develop first and the consonants follow later. Generally speech sounds develop in the following order:-

Sound	50% of children	90% of children
Common Vowels	1½ to 2 years	3 years
p b m n t d w	1½ to 2 years	3 years
k g f h y	1½ to 2 years	4 years
ng s	1½ to 3 years	5 years
l	3 to 4½ years	6 years
sh ch j z v	3½ to 4½ years	6 years
r	4½ to 5 years	7 years
Clusters (such as cl fl br tr sm st sk etc)	5 years	7 years
Clusters (such as str skr spl etc)	5 years	7 years +

It is also common for children to mispronounce words. Some things you might hear include:

Missing off the ends of words 'dog' is said as 'do'	Usually heard up until 2½ years
Sounds made at the back of the mouth (k or g) are made at the front (t or d) eg, 'cat' is said as 'tat', 'go' as 'do'	Usually heard up until 3 years
A long sound (s) is said as a short sound (t) eg, 'sun' is said as 'tun'	Can be heard up until 4 years
When two sounds are said together (eg, sp), one is missed out 'star' is said as 'tar'	Normally heard up until 4½ years
Putting the sounds in the wrong order 'caterpillar' is said as 'paterkiller'	Can be heard up until 5 years (but some adults do it as well!!)

Useful strategies to help your child's speech sounds are:

- turn off background sounds such as the TV
- listen to the message your child is saying rather than how he says it - children often don't know they are saying it incorrectly so making them say it correctly can be confusing and frustrating and reduce their confidence.
- always accept your child's attempt at a word, however unclear it may seem
- your child is not being lazy. Repeat the word clearly back to them putting a slight emphasis on the target sound eg, if your child says 'it's a tat' you say 'yes it's a cat'. This means you are giving them the right model

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- if your child has a dummy take it out when they try and talk. Aim to get rid of the dummy as soon as possible

If you are having trouble understanding the child you could:

- ask them to say it again
- repeat back part of the message eg, 'Going where?' or 'Mum said what?'
- ask them to tell you some more about it
- can they show you or take you there
- use gestures when you talk. This will encourage your child to also use them to get his message across
- use the situation to help you understand eg, pictures in a book or a TV programme that they have watched. Share information with school so you all know what your child has been doing to help with understanding them

- if you think you know what your child has said repeat it back to them clearly
- if you really find it hard to understand don't pretend that you have. On some occasions it may be helpful to blame yourself (eg, 'Mummy's ears aren't working properly today'). However, sometimes you just have to admit that you can't understand. Be reassuring and positive

It is normal for your child to be able to produce a sound by itself eg, 's' but not yet be ready to use it in a word eg, he may continue to say 'tock' for 'sock'. The best way to help is to repeat / model the word as described earlier.

If you would like further information please contact the Speech and Language Therapy team on 0151 514 2334.

Therapist name: Signature: Date:

If you have any queries regarding this information please contact:
The Speech & Language Therapy Team on **0151 604 7271**

If you would like this information in another format, please contact the Your Experience Team on freephone 0800 694 5530. Alternatively you can email wcnt.yourexperience@nhs.net

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