

## **Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service**

# **Speech Sound Development**

This leaflet is about how children learn to say the different sounds that make up words. Speech sounds are either consonants, such as 'p' 'n' 'f', or vowels, such as 'a' 'e' 'o'. By the age of 5-7 years, most children have learnt to use these sounds and can be understood by other people. Some sounds take longer to learn than others. They can be grouped into 'early' 'middle' and 'later' sounds.

Vowel sounds develop alongside 'early' consonant sounds.

Later sounds (5-7 years)

r th

Middle sounds (4-5 years)

v s z sh ch j L

'th' and 'r' typically develop later. These sounds are unlikely to need therapy. Differences in 'r' and 'th' can be linked to local accent.

Early sounds (2-4 years)

p b t d k g m n ng f w y h

All children are individual and learn at their own pace. Some children may need more time before they are ready to learn sounds!

#### **Consonant clusters**

are when two or three sounds join together – there are 32 of these!

This includes:

sw fr ps str sm

These 'clusters' often don't develop until after the age of 5.

#### References

McLeod and Crowe (2018). Cross Linguistic Consonant Acquisition. American Journal of Speech and Language Pathology. 27, 1546-1571.

Shriberg, L. D. (1993). Four new speech and prosody-voice measures for genetics research and other studies in developmental phonological disorders. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 36, 105-140



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# Strategies to support your child's speech

#### What you can do to help:

- Avoid correcting your child's speech sound mistakes or asking them to say words again. Instead, repeat the word back to them in a natural way e.g. 'tar' → 'oh yes, a car'.
- Be positive about what your child is saying rather than focusing on how they are saying it.
- Use a **slow pace**, with lots of **pauses**, so your child can clearly hear your speech. This should naturally help them to slow down their talking.
- Talk about things that you can both see.
- Reduce background noise when talking to your child, for example, turn
  off the TV/ music/ tablet.

### What to do if you don't understand what your child has said:

- Ask them to say it again, but in a **positive way** e.g. 'my ears missed that, can you tell me again?'
- Ask your child to 'show you'.
- Ask a few **key questions**.
- Repeat back what you did understand so your child only has to repeat what you have missed.
- Ask your child to tell you in a different way; they could try using a
  different word, using actions or gesture or older children could draw
  or write the word.