



Speech and Language Therapy Services

Speech Sound Development

Information for Parents and Carers

Speech Sound Development

This leaflet is about how children learn to say the different sounds that make up words. It gives advice on how to help children learn these sounds.

Later, children learn to read 'letter sounds' which may be different from the speech sounds that this leaflet is about (e.g. the letter 'c' can be read as a 'k' sound in 'car' and a 's' sound in 'city').

Speech sounds are either (consonants) such as 'p, n, f' etc. or (vowels) such as 'a, e, i, o, u'.

Young children take time to develop their speech sounds. Each child learns at their own pace, so be patient and encouraging. A sound may be used correctly in one word but not yet achieved in another. This is acceptable.

New sounds are usually used first at the beginning of words and then at the ends or in the middle.



Speech Sound Development:

Approximate Ages of Sound Use

This table shows at what age 50% and 90% of children usually use the sounds listed.

50% of children	90% of children	
most vowels	1½ - 2 years	3 years
p, b, m, n, t, d, w	1½ - 2 years	3 years
k, g, f, h, y	1½ - 3 years	4 years
ng, s	1½ - 3 years	5 years
l	3 - 3½ years	6 years
sh, ch, j, z, v	3½ - 4½ years	6 years
r, th	4½ - 5 years	7 years

NB The common errors of using 'f' for 'th' e.g. 'fumb' for 'thumb' and 'w' for 'r' e.g. 'wed' for 'red' are immaturities not to be worried about and do not need therapy.



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Sound Clusters

Two or more consonants together are known as 'clusters' or 'blends' and take longer to develop e.g. sp, st, pl, cr.

Beginning of Words

Usually by 4 – 4½ years

pl/bl, cl/gl, fl e.g. **play, blue.**

pr/br, tr/dr, fr e.g. **present, bridge.**

qu ('kw') e.g. **queen** has the cluster 'kw'.

Beginning and/or End of Words

Usually by 5 years

sm, sn, sp, st, sk, sw, sl e.g. **smile, spider, ask.**

Ends of Words

Usually by 4 - 4½ years

-ms, -ls, -ps, -ts, -ks e.g. **drums, balls, lips.**

Beginning or Middle of Words

Usually by 5½ years plus

spr, str, scr, spl, thr, shr e.g. **spring, straw, instruction.**

Speech Sounds Advice

1. Avoid correcting your child's speech sound mistakes or making them say it again. Doing this tends not to work and may knock their confidence. Simply repeat the word back to them in a natural way.

E.g. **Child:** "Mummy it's a **nowman.**"

Parent: "Yes it's a big **snowman.**"

2. Be positive about your child and show interest in **what** they talk about instead of **how** they say each word. If over-corrected, a child loses confidence and may talk less or become embarrassed about the way they talk. The more confident and talkative a child is, the more they will be practising and improving their talking skills.
3. Talk about what is happening in books or during events rather than asking lots of questions or expecting your child to name the items. Don't speak too fast as they will try to copy this and 'miss the detail' in their attempts.



4. Listening skills are important in learning speech sounds. Play listening games such as being quiet and saying what you can hear e.g. next door's dog, an aeroplane, a ticking clock. Copy these sounds or make noises that your child can copy for fun.

