

Speech Sounds

Paediatric Community Speech and Language Therapy

What are speech sounds?

- Speech is the production of a sequence of sounds that makes up words.
- Children learn how to use speech sounds by listening to people speaking around them.
- Speech develops from early sound awareness, then babies start with babbling sounds and as they develop into toddlers and children, they progress onto using sounds in words, phrases, sentences then eventually everyday conversation.
- Children's speech sounds develop gradually at different ages which means they will not be able to use all their speech sounds when they first start to talk.
- The typical stages of speech sound development are from 2 – 6 years approximately:
 - **Age up to 2 years - p, b, m, n, h, t,**
 - **Age up to 3 years - d, k, g, f, y, ng.**
 - **Age up to 4 years - v, s, z, l, sh, ch, j.**
 - **Age up to 6 years - r, th and cluster sounds sp, sm, sn, sk, st, sl, sw, br, bl, cl, cr, gl, gr, fl, fr, tr**
- Children may have difficulties producing speech sounds when trying to say the sound on its own, in words, in phrases and / or in whole sentences.
- There are numerous ways in which speech sounds can be difficult for children and therefore, various ways to support these children.

How to help

- Try not to focus on how the child is saying something, focus on what they are trying to tell you.
- Try not to speak for your child, it may take them longer to work out what they want to say and then say it, so give them plenty of time.
- Slow down when you talk to the child. Slowing down your rate of speech will allow your child to hear clear models of speech sounds in words and phrases and it might encourage your child to reduce their pace of talking, which can sometimes help them with making their talking easier to understand.

How to help continued

- Model words clearly by repeating back what the child has said correctly. Try not to say to the child “say the word properly” or “it is not that, it is said like this”, simply say the word back to them as it should be said so they are hearing the correct model and carry on with the interaction.
- Helping the child with being understood by repeating back what you did understand and waiting to see if the child can fill in the gaps. Try asking questions, asking them to show or lead you to what they want, and encourage the child to use gestures, pictures, or objects.
- If you can see that family or someone else cannot understand what your child is talking about, you could try saying something such as “you are telling us about the time we went to the farm to see the animals”, as this includes your child in the conversation and can build confidence in communicating.

Remember to...

Model clear and accurate speech slowly
Make activities fun and interesting
Avoid pointing out your child’s speech sound mistakes
Every activity is an opportunity to use speech

Helpful links

[Tiny Happy People: Specific speech sounds](#)



[Speech & Language UK: Ages and Stages](#)

