

Speech Sound Development

- Fact sheet

How does my child learn different sounds?

Children learn sounds by listening to people around them. This begins from before birth and they carry on tuning into environmental and speech sounds as they grow. Children begin by playing with sounds through babbling around 6-8 months. They then start to produce longer strings of babble by using a wider range of sounds.

At what age does my child learn different speech sounds?

As children learn to talk their speech sound system develops gradually. This means that they cannot say all their sounds straightaway, because some sounds develop later than others. The table below shows the age different speech sounds develop by (NOTE: this guideline is for children who speak English as their home language).

Age	Child usually...
18 - 24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a few speech sounds in their word e.g. p, b, t, d, m and w • misses the ends of words e.g. "ba" for 'ball' or "ca" for 'cat' • repeats part of the word e.g. "bibi" for 'biscuit' • can be understood about half of the time
2 - 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a wider range of speech sounds including the above, k and g • shortens longer sentences e.g. "nana" for 'banana' • has difficulty with words that have lots of consonants e.g. might say "pider" for 'spider' • still misses the ends of words
3 - 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses the above sounds and begins to use f, s, h • has difficulties with saying a small number of sounds e.g. 'r', 'w', 'l', 'f', 'th', 'sh', 'ch' and 'z' • begins to use some middle sounds e.g. 'paper' • uses the end sound but may not always be correct e.g. "fis" for 'fish'
4 - 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses most sounds effectively including l, v, z, sh, ch, j, y • begins to use sh, ch, j in words e.g. 'shoe', 'jam', 'chair' • begins to use some clusters (2 consonant sounds together) e.g. 'bl' in blue and 'sp' in spoon. Sometimes one of these sounds will be missed off e.g. 'nowman' for snowman
5 - 6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses all sounds effectively except 'th' and 'r' e.g. 'gween' for green or 'paf' for path
6 - 7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some children may use 'f' instead of 'th' e.g. "fink" for 'think' due to dialect differences