

Speech Production in Children

Many children experience difficulties with the clarity of their speech. Speech sounds develop from birth and progress rapidly in the pre-school years. We expect most children to be talking so that people can understand them by the age of five.

Which sounds develop when?



3;0 – 3;5 years

m n ng p d t k g w h s z f v y l



3;6 – 3;11 years

ch



4;0 – 4;11 years

j (as in giraffe) zh (as in measure)



5;0 – 5;11 years

sh

6;0 – 6;11 years

r

7;0 + years

th

From: Dodd, B., Hua, Z., Crosbie, S., Holm, A. & Ozanne, A. (2002) *Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology*. London: Pearson Education Inc.

Speech difficulties

Sometimes things happen to slow down speech development (e.g. hearing or physical difficulties). Some children have difficulties with particular sounds where there doesn't seem to be a reason. Children with speech difficulties can make progress with the right support. Common speech sound errors are:

- **Fronting** (changing a sound made at the 'back' of your mouth, such as 'k' or 'g', to a sound made at the 'front', such as 't' or 'd') e.g. car → "tar"
- **Stopping** (changing a 'hissing' sound like 'f', 's' or 'sh' to a 'stopped' sound like 'p', 't', or 'k') e.g. sock → "dock"
- **Gliding** (changing a 'l' or 'r' sound into a 'y' or 'w' sound) e.g. yellow → "yeyow"; red → "wed"
- **Cluster reduction** (groups of consonant clusters such as 'bl', 'sn' or 'gr' are simplified) e.g. blue → "boo"; snake → "nake"; great → "gate"

Some children show some of these errors, and some show other patterns. A Speech and Language Therapist may assess the difficulties and decide that this child's errors do not need direct involvement from the service at this time. However, there are some strategies which can help the speech to be clearer.

Strategies to Develop Speech Skills

- √ **Speak clearly** and simply to your child, so they are getting a good model of how to use speech.
- √ **Accept what your child says** as a good try, even if they aren't using the correct sounds. Make comments about the content of what they are saying, rather than how they say it.
- √ **Say your child's sentence back to them**, so they hear the correct version (e.g. child: 'they're at the deedide'; teacher: "yes, they are at the seaside")
- √ **Try not to over-correct** or ask your child to say it "properly". This may affect their confidence with talking.
- √ **Ask your child to tell you in another way, or show you** what they mean if you're struggling to understand what they say.
- √ **Focus your child on listening to sounds** by playing listening game to help them to focus and concentrate on sounds in the environment (e.g. ask everyone to be quiet and listen for the sounds they can hear from the house, like a tap dripping or the TV next door. See if your child can identify what the sound is).
- √ **Show your child how you make a sound**, if you know that they are having difficulties with a particular one (e.g. 'look at my mouth when I say 'f'... see my teeth are on my bottom lip')