

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Speech Development – What to Expect

When we talk about speech development we mean the consonant and vowel sounds that make up words. E.g. CAT is made up of 2 consonants /c/ /t/ and a vowel /a/.

- Children develop the ability to talk clearly using all the speech sounds over a period of up to 7 years.
- Speech sounds don't come all at once but usually in a predictable order with the more complicated sounds coming later than the easier ones.
- While they are learning to talk in these early years children will naturally substitute more advanced sounds with easier ones .
- Your child is not being lazy if they don't pronounce a word in an 'adult' way.
- If your child still has a dummy, remove it if possible if your child tries to talk 'around' it and try to wean your child off the dummy completely.
- Children under 3 are usually best understood by people who are very familiar with them. If no one understands a child of this age then a SLT referral would be warranted.
- The table overleaf describes the normal progression of children's speech and explains why words can sound unclear. Usually this is not something to be concerned about but is a phase which most children will pass through on the road to speech maturity.
- It is important to take these ages and stages into account when you are listening to your child so that you are not trying to correct a substitution that they are not ready to change.

For further advice on how to help your child, please follow the strategies on the advice sheet 'Top Ten Tips for clearer speech.'

Sound	Age sounds are usually achieved by	Examples of sound in child's speech	Sound substitutions in developing speech
p, b, m, w	3yrs 5mths	Pop, baby, more, where	p may sound like b to begin with eg pee → bee
t, d, n	3yrs 5mths	Two, daddy, no	t may sound like d to begin with eg two → do
ng	3yrs 5mths	sing	Child may use /n/ eg sing → sin up to the age of 5
k/c, g	3yrs 5mths	Car, walk, go, bag	Child may use /t/ /d/ instead until 3;11 Eg car → tar bag → bad
h	3yrs 5mths	home	/h/ may be left off initially eg home → ome
f, v	3yrs 5mths	fork, coffee, off van, river, move	child may use p,b,t or,d until 3;06 eg fork → bork
s, z	3yrs 5mths	Seesaw, bus, zebra nose	Child may use /t/or /d/ until 3;06+ Seesaw → deedaw
y	3yrs 5mths	Yogurt, buying	
l	3yrs 11mths	Light, balloon	child may use 'w' or 'y' until 4yrs eg like → wike
Consonant blends eg sp, fl, st	3yrs 11 months	Spider, flower, nest basket	Child will reduce the consonant blend of 2 sounds to 1 eg spider – pider or sider
sh, zh	4 yrs 11 mths	Sheep, wash measure	May use as /t/ or /d/ until 3;0 May use /s/ /z/ after this until 5 yrs eg sheep → seep
ch, j/dg	4yrs 11 mths	chip, watch jump, badge	May use as /t/ or /d/ until 4;0 May use as /ts//dz/ until 5 yrs eg watch → wats
Consonant blends of 3 consonants e.g. spl---	5yrs 11 months	split	Consonant blends of 2 or 3 sounds including r eg , bread, spring may not develop till age 6;5+
r	6 yrs 5 mths	rabbit, carry	Gliding: may present as /w/ or /y/ until 6;06 Eg rabbit → wabbit
th (θ) th (ð)	7yrs+	thumb there	May use b then f/v until 7yrs eg thumb → fum May use d until 4+ then v