

Speech sounds

Children learn the sounds of speech gradually. Many young children's speech in the first few years will be unclear and often difficult to understand. It is important to remember that such difficulties are common to many young children and that in most cases they will get better by themselves. A child may not produce all the sounds necessary for English until the age of six.

When a child or young person has difficulties using speech sounds they may:

- Have difficulties making themselves understood
- Be reluctant to talk in class
- Have difficulty getting the sounds in the right order in words
- Be difficult to understand when not in context
- Sound younger than they are

Speech development can be affected by:

- Hearing difficulties
- Listening and attention difficulties
- Using a dummy when younger
- Structural factors, e.g. missing teeth, cleft palate

Everyday strategies

- Let the child tell you by using mime , gesture or pointing.
- Make time for special time so your child can have your undivided attention and you can focus on them
- Eye contact: When you talk to the child, make sure you get the child's eye contact first. Face the child and bend down to their level
- Help the child to listen: e.g. comment when you hear noises like the doorbell, dogs barking, birds singing. Try to have time without the TV or radio on so that the child can listen to other sounds
- Praise: Always praise the child when s/he has said a word clearly
- Avoid directly correcting the speech of children with speech difficulties. Instead, make a point of speaking slowly and clearly and make sure the child is looking at you when you talk
- Always repeat back wrongly pronounced words to the child so they hear the correct pronunciation.
- Let the child know when s/he is not understood: If you do not understand, let the child know this.
- Encourage him/her to clarify, using one or more of the following strategies:
 - Saying it again louder
 - Repeating just the words that you did not understand
 - Show what he is saying using gesture or pointing
 - Asking someone else to interpret (best friend or sibling)
- Ask a forced choice question such as "Are you talking about assembly or play time?"
"Is it something that happened today or yesterday?"

Activities

- Try playing with sounds frequently (about five minutes, at least three times a week).
- Use actions or facial expression to keep it fun.
- Try practicing in front of a mirror so the child can see how s/he is making the sounds. Show the child how you make the sounds so s/he can copy you e.g.
 - **M** eating something yummy! – ‘mmm’
 - **P** bubbles popping – ‘p..p..p..p’
 - **B** bouncy ball – ‘b..b..b’
 - **T** tap dripping – ‘t..t..t..t’
 - **D** drum beating – ‘d..d..d’
 - **S** snake hissing – ‘sssss’
 - **SH** teddy sleeping – ‘shhh’
 - **F** fireworks whizzing – ‘fffff’
- Make a sound book for a sound you have identified the child as having particular difficulty with. Support the child to find photographs/pictures of words beginning and ending with this sound (e.g. from the internet, catalogues, newspapers and magazines). Encourage the child to help you cut out and stick these pictures into their sound book. Alternatively they could draw or colour in pictures of things beginning and ending with the sound. You can label the pictures for the child to hear how the words sound but do not expect them to repeat the words
- Encourage the child to practise clapping out the beats/syllables in different words. Begin with family members and everyday objects. They will find it easier to clap out shorter words to start with.

Speech Sound Development

Speech sounds are usually acquired in the following order:

By 2 years old	p, b, m, w, h ,
By 3 years old	t, ,d, ,n,
By 4 years old	k, g, f, s,
By 5 years old	sh, ch, j, l,
By 6 years old	sp, st, sk, sw, sl, spr, str, scr, bl, br, pl, pr, tr, dr, cl, gl, fl, fr,
By 7 years old	th (unless not present in the regional dialect)