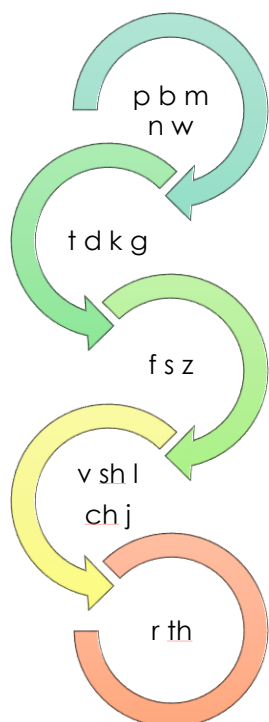


Speech sounds

Speech sound development is a complex process that takes time to fully mature. Some sounds develop later than others, so it is normal for children to use certain sounds before others. Generally, for children whose home language is English, speech sounds tend to develop in the following way:



1-2 years

Child using vowel sounds and early consonants. May not use sounds at the ends of words (e.g. 'ho' for horse) or may use the same sound at the beginning/end (e.g. 'gog' for dog). Child may replace quieter sounds with louder ones (e.g. 'big' for pig).

2-3 years

Back sounds 'k' and 'g' may be emerging, but often produced at the front of the mouth while developing (e.g. 'tar' for car, 'do' for go). Child is likely to miss off parts of longer words (e.g. 'efant' for elephant, 'nana' for banana).

3-4 years

Long sounds likely to be emerging, but may be replaced by short sounds while developing (e.g. 'dun' for sun, 'beet' for feet). Child's speech will be understood by close family and usually understood by familiar adults outside the home.

4-5 years

Consonant blends (e.g. 'sp', 'st', 'bl', etc.) will start to emerge but many will still be reduced to single sounds (e.g. 'poon' for spoon, 'bue' for blue). Likely to be substituting 'w' or 'y' for 'l' and 'r' (e.g. 'yeg' for leg, 'wabbit' for rabbit). By 5 years old, most children will be understood by both familiar and unfamiliar listeners most of the time.

5+ years

The 'r' and 'th' sounds tend to be the last sounds to develop and the child may still have difficulties producing these sounds. Often children don't use these sounds until at least 6 years old and they may not be in their fully mature form until 7 years old. There are also different variations of how people produce the 'r' sound.

Often, when a sound is still developing, your child may be able to copy the sound but not use it when speaking. For example, they may be able to make a snake sound 'sss', but still say 'dun' for 'sun'. Other times, a child may have difficulty articulating the sound itself. Speech sound difficulties can impact some children's ability to make themselves understood. Some children require input from Speech and Language Therapy to support their speech sound development.

What to do if you don't understand:



- Ask your child to take you or show you.
- Can your child tell you some more about it?
- Ask a question to try to find out some more information (e.g. 'Did this happen at home or nursery?').
- Repeat back any part you did understand, so that your child does not have to repeat their whole message again (e.g. 'You and Mum went...?').



Strategies for speech sound development:

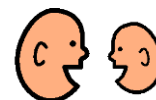
- **Model** – repeat words back the right way. This is called *modelling* and shows your child how to use speech sounds correctly. You don't need to get them to repeat words after you.

e.g. Child: 'Bis'
Adult: 'Oh, a fish.'



- **Repeat**. Use repetition to emphasise words and provide your child with additional examples of how words should sound.

e.g. Child: 'A tat!'
Adult: 'Yes, a cat. I see the cat. What a cute cat.'



- Don't correct mistakes – respond to *what* your child is saying, not *how* they are saying it. Be positive and give your child lots of encouragement.
- Always use the sound, not the letter name (i.e. 'fff' not 'f-uh' or 'F').
- Have fun sharing rhyming books and singing **songs and rhymes** together. The [Bookbug](https://www.bookbug.co.uk/) website has a great song and rhyme library.
- Have fun playing with sounds and **talk about sounds** you can hear in the environment (e.g. 'Listen... I can hear a helicopter' or 'mmm... milk! That starts with 'mmm', just like mummy!')
- Don't pretend to understand if you haven't. Encourage your child to use gesture to show you or to tell you some more information.
- Consider sharing information between settings if your child's speech is difficult to understand to less familiar listeners. For example, tell nursery/school the news or events your child is likely to talk about, and share names or topics they are likely to mention.



See [Speech and Language UK](https://www.nhsscotland.gov.uk/speech-language-therapy/) for more information on children's speech sounds.



Speech and
Language UK

