

# When children learn sounds

This is a very general guide to show the pattern of speech sound development:

<p><i>from birth to 18mths</i></p> 	<p>Many words will sound very different from how we would say them but, so long as it's a word, the sounds don't really matter at this age. Beginnings and ends of words will often be left off ('te' for teddy, 'du' for duck). Often only parents know what the child is saying.</p>	<p>p b t d n m</p>
<p><i>up to about 2 ½ years</i></p> 	<p>Some ends of words are still missing, but many are now being used. Often, the last sound of the word is made the same as the first so that 'dog' may be 'dod' or 'gog.'</p>	<p>p b t d n m w usually f sometimes s</p>
<p><i>up to about 3 years</i></p> 	<p>Often children are still using 't' for 'c/k' and 'd' for 'g' so that 'car' becomes 'tar' and 'got' becomes 'dot'. Some children still use a hard sound for a soft one, so 'sea' is 'dea'. 'f' and 'v' may be 'b' so that 'farm' is 'barm' and van is 'ban.'</p>	<p>p b t d n m w c/k g f v s</p>
<p><i>up to about 3 ½ years</i></p> 	<p>Now beginning to use 'c/k' and 'g' as well as 'f' and 'v'. 's' may be used in 'house' or 'sit down' but missed out in blends e.g. 'spoon' is 'poon'.</p>	<p>p b t d n m w c/k g f v s z</p>
<p><i>up to about 4 years</i></p> 	<p>'c/k' and 'g' are usually fine as well as 'f'. Some children will still miss out 's' in words like 'spider' and 'stamp'. 'l' and 'r' may be missed out in blends e.g. 'pate' for 'plate' or mixed up as in 'yion' for 'lion'. Some sounds may still be difficult: sh, ch, j, th, l, r.</p>	<p>p b t d n m w c/k g f v s z sometimes l &amp; r</p>
<p><i>up to about 5 years</i></p> 	<p>Most sounds will be correct by now, except for 'r', 'l' and 'th'. Children may still mix up or leave sounds out of longer words, so that hospital is 'hopital' or 'hostipal' and spaghetti is 'sgetti.'</p>	<p>p b t d n m w c/k g f v s z l r y usually s sh ch j</p>
<p><i>up to 6 years</i></p>	<p>By the end of Year One, most children are using blends (two sounds together) but these may not be accurate e.g. 'gween' instead of 'green'. Many children still have trouble with 'th', 'r.'</p>	<p>Most sounds now correct</p>
<p><i>After 6 years</i></p>	<p>Most children have all their speech sounds correct by around 8 years of age.</p>	<p>All sounds correct</p>

These are general guidelines. It is also important to consider:

- Where in the word the sound is used.  
Sounds are often used at the end of a word before the beginning. So the child may be able to say 'bike' before they can say 'key'.
- How long it takes to acquire a sound.  
They may be able to say the sound on its own or copy the sound but it can take a long time before they use it in a word by themselves. It may take a while for the child to be able to use the sound correctly in *all* words and in conversation.
- Whether the sound is followed by another sound.  
The child may be able to say 'sun' but not 'spoon' because blending 's' and 'p' together is harder than saying 's' at the beginning of a word.
- Whether the child is of preschool age.  
It is likely that the following sounds will not be established: consonant blends (e.g. 'spider', 'train', 'plate').  
These sounds may not be consistently correct until 7 - 8 years: 'sh', 'ch', 'j', 'l', 'r', 'th'.
- How accurately the sounds are produced.  
If your child has a lisp (puts their tongue between their teeth for 's' e.g. 'thock' for 'sock') they do not need therapy until they have their second teeth.
- The context.  
It is easier to understand children when you know the context of what they are talking about.

If you are not sure what sounds your child can or cannot say, put together some objects and pictures in a feely bag and ask them to tell you what they pull out of the bag e.g. key, car, fire, leaf, sock, soap, bus.

The table below can also help you to decide whether or not your child requires a Speech and Language Therapy referral. Find the age of your child; for example, if they are 3 years 8 months old, look at the 3 ½ year age range (as they are not yet 4 years old).

Referral to Speech and Language Therapy is NOT required	A referral to Speech and Language Therapy can be considered
<b>Age 2 years</b>	<b>Age 2 years</b>
There is no sound at the end of a word (e.g. says 'be' for 'bed' or 'u' for 'up')	No babble
Not using 'k', 'g', 'f', 's', 'sh', 'ch', 'j' sounds	No words
Not using 'l', 'r', 'th' sounds	Only using vowel sounds in most/all words (e.g. says 'o' for 'dog' or 'u' for 'cup')
Not using blends where there are two sounds together e.g. says 'piness' for 'Princess', 'gandad' for 'grandad', 'bwooken' for 'broken'	
<b>Age 3 years</b>	<b>Age 3 years</b>
Not using 'k', 'g' sounds (e.g. says 'tup' for 'cup' or 'pid' for 'pig')	There is no sound at the beginning of a word (e.g. says 'ed' for 'bed' or 'ig' for 'pig')
Not using 'f', 's', 'sh', 'ch', 'j' sounds	There is no sound at the end of a word (e.g. says 'be' for 'bed' or 'u' for 'up')
Not using 'l', 'r', 'th' sounds	
Not using blends where there are two sounds together e.g. says 'piness' for 'Princess', 'gandad' for 'grandad', 'bwooken' for 'broken'	
Has a lisp (e.g. says 'thun' for 'sun')	
Can say sounds or words better when they are copying you	
People unfamiliar with the child often find the child hard to understand but close family members usually understand	
<b>Age 3 ½ years</b>	<b>Age 3 ½ years</b>
Can use 'f' or 's' sometimes (e.g. can say 'fire' but not 'football' or can say 'mouse' but not 'sun')	There is no sound at the end of a word (e.g. says 'be' for 'bed' or 'u' for 'up')
Not using 'k', 'g' sounds (e.g. says 'tup' for 'cup' or 'pid' for 'pig')	Never uses 'f' or 's' sounds (e.g. says 'bish' or 'dish' for 'fish', 'dun' for 'sun')
Not using 'sh', 'ch', 'j' sounds	
Not using 'l', 'r', 'th' sounds	
Not using blends where there are two sounds together e.g. says 'piness' for 'Princess', 'gandad' for 'grandad', 'bwooken' for 'broken'	
Has a lisp (e.g. says 'thun' for 'sun')	
Can say the sound or word when they are copying you	
<b>Age 4 years</b>	<b>Age 4 years</b>
Can use 'f' or 's' sometimes e.g. can say 'knife' but not 'fire' or can say 'mouse' but not 'sun'	There is no sound at the end of a word (e.g. says 'be' for 'bed' or 'u' for 'up')
Can use 'k' or 'g' in some words (e.g. says 'tar')	There is no sound at the beginning of a word

for 'car' but can say 'fork'). They may say 'tat' for 'cat' and 'dod' for 'dog' but can use 'k' and 'g' in other words.	(e.g. says 'ed' for 'bed' or 'ig' for 'pig')
Not yet using the sounds 'sh', 'ch', 'j' sounds (e.g. says 'sop' for 'shop', 'fis' for 'fish', 'tair' for 'chair', 'dump' for 'jump')	Not using 't' and 'd' sounds at all (e.g. says 'kea' for 'tea' or 'gaggy' for 'daddy')
Not using 'l', 'r', 'th' sounds	Not using 'f' or 's' sounds (e.g. says 'bish' for 'fish', 'dun' for 'sun', 'knipe' for 'knife', 'mout' for 'mouse')
Has trouble saying longer words e.g. 'hospital', 'spagetti'	Not using 'k' and 'g' sounds at all (e.g. says 'tar' for 'car' and 'fort' for 'fork')
Not yet using blends where there are two consonants together e.g. says 'pincess' for 'Princess', 'gandad' for 'grandad', 'bwoke' for 'broken'	
Has a lisp (e.g. says 'thun' for 'sun')	
<b>Age 5 ½ years</b>	<b>Age 5 ½ years</b>
Has trouble saying 'yellow' (e.g. says 'yeyow' or 'lellow') but can use 'l' in other words e.g. 'light', 'long', 'pillow'	There is no sound at the end of a word (e.g. says 'be' for 'bed' or 'u' for 'up')
Has a lisp (e.g. says 'thun' for 'sun')	There is no sound at the beginning of a word (e.g. says 'ed' for 'bed' or 'ig' for 'pig')
Has trouble saying longer words e.g. 'hospital', 'spagetti'	Not using 't' and 'd' sounds at all (e.g. says 'kea' for 'tea' or 'gaggy' for 'daddy')
	Not using 'f' or 's' sounds (e.g. says 'bish' for 'fish', 'dun' for 'sun', 'knipe' for 'knife', 'mout' for 'mouse')
	Not using blends where there are two consonants together (e.g. says 'boon' for 'spoon', 'back' for 'black' or 'gass' for 'grass')
	Not using 'sh', 'ch', 'j' sounds (e.g. says 'sop' for 'shop', 'fis' for 'fish', 'tair' for 'chair', 'dump' for 'jump')
	Not using 'l' (e.g. says 'yet' for 'let' or 'wight' for 'light')
<b>7 years and older</b>	<b>7 years and older</b>
Not using 'r' (e.g. says 'wed' for 'red) and the child is not concerned and it is not causing any problems for them	Not using 'r' (e.g. says 'wed' for 'red) and the child is concerned about this
Not using 'th' (e.g. says 'fumb' for 'thumb', 'ba' for 'bath')	
Has a lisp but they have not had their second top teeth in place for six months	Has a lisp (e.g. says 'thun' for sun) and they have had their second top teeth in place for six months
	Has a distorted 's' i.e. it sounds like the Welsh 'Ll' in 'Llandudno' (the air flows along the sides of the tongue rather than over the top). This can also occur with 'sh', 'ch', 'j' sounds.