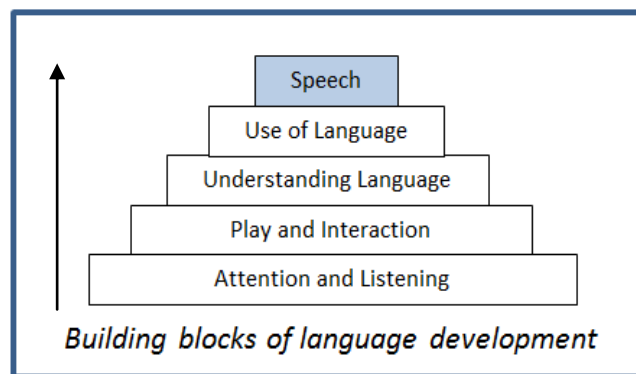


Speech Sound Development
Preschool and School-aged Children

General Information

Children go through stages when they learn new skills. For example, before they learn to walk they learn to sit, crawl and cruise holding on to furniture. Children go through stages when they are learning to talk as well. For example, before they learn to use clear speech they learn to listen, understand and then use words and sentences.



Similarly, children go through stages with developing speech sounds and this is a gradual process. Each child is different but most children follow a similar pattern. The first sounds that children learn are sounds that are easy to make e.g. 'b' is made by putting the lips together. Later on in development, they learn to say sounds that are harder to make e.g. 'f' is made by putting the top teeth and bottom lip together with just the right amount of pressure for the air to flow through. Later on still, children learn to put two sounds together in blends e.g. 'Grandma'.

Children develop skills at different rates with talking just as they do with walking. Please read the information sheet 'When Children Learn Sounds' for more information.

Dummies

Dummies can help very young babies, especially those that are born prematurely, to establish good sucking patterns and they can help babies settle to sleep but their usefulness declines after about six months. Using dummies may reduce babbling and restricts tongue movements, affecting how the child makes some speech sounds. It can also impact on the formation of their teeth and is sometimes linked with middle ear infections. It is recommended that dummies are not used after 12 mths, especially when the child is awake and active.

Tongue ties

The tongue is loosely attached to the floor of the mouth by a piece of skin. When a baby is tongue tied, this piece of skin is unusually short and tight which affects the movement of the tongue. Tongue ties affect a small number of new-born babies and may affect their feeding; if so, the tongue tie can be cut.

Tongue ties are often thought to cause speech errors however children tend not to need speech and language therapy for their tongue tie. Having a tongue tie only affects the ability to make sounds where the tongue tip is lifted, such as 'n', 't', 'd', 's', 'l'. The tongue tip is not used in many sounds, such as 'm', 'p', 'b', 'k', 'g', 'f', so these will not be affected by the tongue tie. When children have a tongue tie they learn to adapt and use a different part of their tongue to make tongue tip sounds.

Links with literacy

Many people think that if a child has trouble saying speech sounds this will affect their ability to read and write and with some children this is the case. However, with the majority of children, their speech is in fact helped by learning to read and write.

In their Reception Year, children practise letters and sounds every day and learning to listen to sounds in words often helps their speech sounds to develop. Children's reading and writing skills are assessed and supported in school by school staff.