WHEN CHILDREN LEARN SOUNDS

# A GENERAL GUIDE TO SHOW THE PATTERN OF SPEECH SOUND DEVELOPMENT

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| **AGE OF CHILD** | **THE TYPES OF ERRORS A CHILD MIGHT MAKE WHEN THEY SAY WORDS** | **SOUNDS YOU MIGHT HEAR (BUT ARE NOT ALWAYS USED CORRECTLY)** |
| MCj02816920000[1]BIRTH TO 2 YEARS | 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 Often only parents know what the child is saying. | p b t d n m w |
| MCj04245460000[1]UP TO ABOUT 2 ½ YEARS | Children may make sounds louder so ‘tea’ is ‘dea’ or ‘paw’ is ‘bore’. Ends of words will often be left off (‘te’ for teddy, ‘du’ for duck). The last sound of the word may be made the same as the first so that 'dog' may be 'dod' or 'gog.' | p b t d n m w h (sometimes c/k g) |
| MCj04260560000[1]UP TO ABOUT 3 YEARS | Children may make sounds louder so ‘tea’ is ‘dea’ or ‘paw’ is ‘bore’. Ends of words will often be left off (‘te’ for teddy, ‘du’ for duck). 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 short sound for a long one, so ‘sea’ is 'dee’; ‘farm’ is 'barm' and van is 'ban.' | p b t d n m wh c/k gf s y |
| MPj04385130000[1]UP TO ABOUT 3 ½ YEARS | 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 b t d n m wh c/k gf s y(sometimes l)  |
| MCj03700640000[1]UP TO ABOUT 4 ½ YEARS | 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 b t d n m wc/k gf s y lv z sh ch j(sometimes r) |
| MCj03488570000[1]AFTER 4 ½ YEARS | Many children still have trouble with ‘th’ and ‘r.’  | p b t d n m wc/k gf s y lv z sh ch jr th |

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 in preschool: consonant blends (e.g. ‘spider’, ‘train’, ‘plate’).

* 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 assessment. 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).

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| Referral to Speech and Language Therapy is NOT required | A referral to Speech and Language Therapy can be considered |
| **Age 2 years** | **Age 2 years** |
| 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 ‘pincess’ for ‘Princess’, ‘gandad’ for ‘grandad’, ‘bwoken’ for ‘broken’ |  |
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| **Age 3 years** | **Age 3 years** |
| 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 ‘pincess’ for ‘Princess’, ‘gandad’ for ‘grandad’, ‘bwoken’ 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 |  |
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| **Age 3 ½ years** | **Age 3 ½ years** |
| 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 beginning or end of a word (e.g. says ‘be’ for ‘bed’ or ‘ar’ for ‘car’) |
| 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 ‘pincess’ for ‘Princess’, ‘gandad’ for ‘grandad’, ‘bwoken’ for ‘broken’ |  |
| Has a lisp (e.g. says ‘thun’ for ‘sun’) |  |
| Can say the sound or word when they are copying you |  |
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| **Age 4 years** | **Age 4 years** |
| 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’ 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.  | There is no sound at the beginning of a word (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’, ‘bwoken’ for ‘broken’ |  |
| Has a lisp (e.g. says ‘thun’ for ‘sun’) |  |
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| **Age 5 ½ years** | **Age 5 ½ years** |
| 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’) |
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| **7 years and older** | **7 years and older** |
| 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’, ‘baf’ 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. |