

# Tips for helping your child at home



# Children with Unclear Speech

Speech refers to the sounds we put together to form words. This table demonstrates typical speech sound development (or when their use can be encouraged) including errors that we often see in early years.

Age in years	Expected Sounds	Developmental speech error patterns which may be seen at this age
1-2	Typically a limited number of sounds heard (p, b, t, d, m, n, w & vowel sounds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children will often miss the ends of words at this stage Dog → do</li> <li>Children may make quiet sounds (e.g. p/ t) noisier Pen → Ben</li> </ul>
2-3	A wider range of sounds are heard (+ h, ng)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Longer words are often shortened Banana → nana Tomato → mato</li> <li>Sounds with a longer airflow (sh, s, f, z) may be shortened Sun → dun ship → dip van → ban</li> <li>Sounds produced at the back of the mouth (k &amp; g) may be produced at the front instead (as t or d) Cat → tat Go → do</li> <li>There may also be difficulty where consonant sounds come together in a word e.g. they may say 'pider' instead of 'spider'</li> </ul>
3-4	S, f, k, g, l sounds are emerging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children may typically still have difficulties with a small number of sounds – for example 'r', 'w', 'l', 'f', 'th', 'sh', 'ch' and 'z'</li> </ul>
4-5	Y, sh – as in 'shop', ch – as in 'witch', 'chip' j – as in 'jug' ʒ– as in 'measure' Consonant blends e.g. 'bl' in blue used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use most sounds effectively. However, they may have some difficulties with more difficult words such as 'spaghetti' or 'splash'</li> <li>They may glide 'r' and 'l' sounds to a 'w' Rabbit → wabbit Leaf → weaf</li> <li>produce 'th' as 'f'</li> </ul>
5-7	V, z, r, th emerging	

Children's ability to say different sounds does not develop all at once. It is a gradual process and all children develop at their own pace. In fact, young children's speech is often 'unclear', i.e. they use wrong sounds in words. Many children have speech difficulties without an obvious cause.

Speech sound development can also be impacted by:

- Genetics – speech sound difficulties tend to run in families
- Recurrent ear infections or colds which cause children to miss out on hearing speech sounds used
- Poor sound awareness skills. E.g. difficulty rhyming words/ clapping out syllables
- Overuse of dummies can stop your child experimenting with making sounds and using words

It is important to note that speech sound disorders are not caused by parenting or being bilingual.

### **When should I be concerned?**

- If you understand your child, but others (e.g. nursery/ school staff) don't. As a rough guide, your child's speech should be 100% intelligible by 3-4 years old
- If your child's speech sound difficulties are impacting on their communication and relationships with others
- If your child begins to communicate less, become withdrawn or demonstrate frustration when misunderstood



It is the role of a Speech & Language Therapist to assess the sound patterns your child is using and decide if they would benefit from support.

## How can I help my child with unclear speech at home?

Remember it takes time to develop a new speech sound and to use it in conversation

- React to **what** your child says; **not how** clearly they speak: this lets your child know you value what they are saying
- **Do not make your child repeat words:** Drawing a child's attention to errors can have a negative impact on their confidence. Your child may not realise they are mispronouncing words and also may not be able to use the target sound yet
- **Repeat what your child says, modelling the correct production:** For example, if your child says 'I see a **tat**', you could say 'I see a **cat**, too! It's a fluffy **cat**' while putting slight emphasis on the error sound
- **Try playing word games to help your child listen to the sounds around them:** reading rhyming stories together, clapping out the number of syllables in longer words & talking about what sound a word begins with are some of our favourite ways to listen out for sounds! See our '*Sound Awareness*' leaflets for further ideas



## What do I do if I don't understand my child's speech?

- Ask them to say it again but do so positively e.g. 'My ears missed that, can you say it again please?'
- Repeat back what you did understand so your child only has to repeat what you missed e.g. 'you were playing with Ben...'
- Start a home-school diary to give you context e.g. 'I think you're telling me about lunch today?' or give a choice 'is it something that happened in class or the playground?'
- Ask your child to show you what they are talking about using gesture or by taking you to the object

If you don't understand - don't pretend to!

Reassure your child and acknowledge that talking can be difficult e.g. "I think you are trying to say something hard and I am not sure what it is.

Maybe we can find out later"