

Babbled sounds develop into attempts at real words. Vowel sounds develop first and the consonants follow later. Generally children can say these sounds by the following ages:

Sound	50% of children	90% of children
Common vowels	1 ½ to 2 years	3 years
p b m n t d w	1 ½ to 2 years	3 years
k g f h y	1 ½ to 3 years	4 years
ng s	1 ½ to 3 years	5 years
l	3 to 3 ½ years	6 years
sh ch j z v	3 ½ to 4 ½ years	6 years
r	4 ½ to 5 years	7 years
Clusters (such as cl fl br tr sm st sk etc)	5 years	7 years
Clusters (such as str skr spl etc)	5 years plus	7 years plus

It is also common for children to mispronounce some words while they are learning. Some things you might hear include:

Missing off the ends of words e.g. “dog” is said as “do”	Usually heard until 2 ½ years
Making sounds made at the back of the mouth (k or g) at the front. e.g. “cat” is said as “tat”, “go” as “do”	Usually heard until 3 years
Saying long sounds such as ‘s’ as shorter sounds such as ‘t’ e.g. “sun” is said as “tun”	Can be heard until 4 years
When two sounds are said together (eg: sp), missing one out e.g. “star” is said as “tar”	Can be heard until 4½ years
Putting the sounds in the wrong order e.g. “caterpillar” is said as “paterkiller”	Can be heard until 5 years
Pronouncing ‘s’ as a ‘th’ (also known as a lisp)	Can be heard until 5 years

Helping Children with Speech Sounds



Speech sound development is a complex process and can take time to develop. There may be times when you don't understand your child. This can be frustrating but do not worry; there are some useful strategies you can try in this leaflet.

Sounds develop in a particular order and some are more difficult than others, for example “ch” is harder than “p” and tends to develop later.

There are other sounds which you would expect to hear later; for example “sp”, “bl” and “cr”. (See the table overleaf for further information.)

Things you can do to help

- 😊 Always be positive about your child’s speech and use lots of praise.
- 😊 Have fun playing with interesting sounds together, like animal and transport noises.
- 😊 Encourage your child to talk and play with others. This will help their communication skills and confidence to develop.
- 😊 Turn off the TV, radio and DVD whilst you practise so your child can hear you and other people speaking.
- 😊 Repeat words clearly back to your child without asking them to copy (this is called modelling).

Child: “look, a tat”

You: “Yes it’s a cat”

- 😊 Listen to *what* your child says and not *how* they say it.
- 😊 Songs and rhymes can be really helpful.

Things to avoid

- ☹ Don’t tell your child that they have made a mistake ... try to accept their attempt at a word, however unclear it may seem. Use modelling instead.
- ☹ Don’t try to make your child say a sound or word correctly. This may lead to frustration or a negative attitude towards speaking.
- ☹ Talking around a dummy can cause speech problems. It is better to reduce the use of dummies altogether, but if not, it should always come out for talking.

If you are having trouble understanding your child you could:

- ✓ **Ask them to say it again**
- ✓ **Go back and repeat the part of the message you understood e.g. “Going where?” or “Mum said what?”**
- ✓ **Ask them to tell you some more about it**
- ✓ **Can they show you or take you there?**

Once you think you have grasped what the child has said, repeat it back to them.

