

# Contact

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## Early Years Speech and Language Therapy

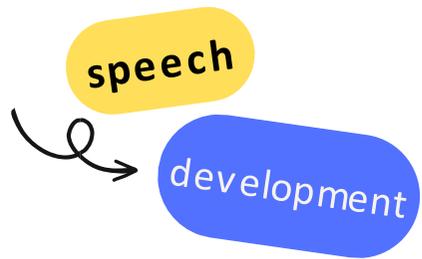
speech

sound

development

Information for  
parents, carers and  
practitioners

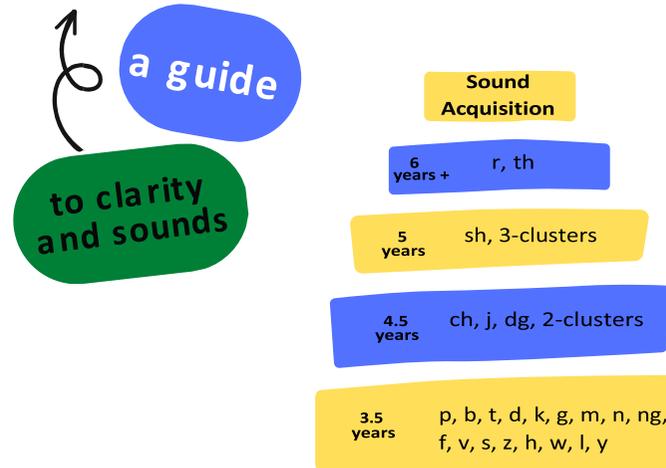




Typically, children's speech steadily improves so by the time they are 4 years they are clear and understood by everyone (although there may still be some sounds they find difficult to say).

### When should I be concerned?

This is a rough guide to the age when children can typically make each sound (although they may not yet be using the sounds correctly in their everyday speech):



### What if I don't understand my child?

This can be really tricky, and sometimes frustrating for both of you. Here are some strategies to support these situations:

- **Show your child that you are interested** in what they are saying (rather than how they are saying it). Get down to their level and give natural eye contact as they talk to you
- **Don't be afraid to say sensitively that you can't understand**, "Sorry Billy, I didn't understand that word, can you tell me again"
- **Repeat back** the part of the message you have understood, so that they don't have to say it all again, e.g. "I know you're telling me about the sandpit..."
- **Try to use clues** to guess what your child might be talking about or ask questions, e.g. "did this happen at the park or at home?"
- **Ask them to "show me"**

**Be face-to-face** when talking together so that your child can see the way your mouth makes the sounds.

**Repeat back** your child's words using the correct sounds, e.g. Child: "a tat!" Adult: "oh yes, it's a cat!"

**Play listening games**, e.g. go for walks and talk about the noises you hear, hide a noisy toy (e.g. egg timer) and see if your child can find it

**Play around with sounds** during play and daily routines. You can make animal noises, make silly sounds/lip shapes, make sounds while you play, e.g. brum brum, beep beep, choo choo, nee-naw, woof

**Make sound bags**, gather some objects that start with a sound your child finds tricky to say. Take turns to take an item out of the bag, and name it for your child. Hold the item near your mouth so they can see how your lips and tongue are moving

**Avoid asking your child to repeat words back to you** - if they could say the words clearly they would!



When learning to say words children can be difficult to understand at first because of the 'mistakes' in their pronunciation - these 'mistakes' are **very common**. Younger children often change some of the sounds so the words are easier to say. Some of the most common sound changes are:

**Stopping**: using a short sound (e.g. p/b/d) instead of a long sound (e.g. s/sh/f), e.g. saying 'finger' as "pinger" or 'sun' as "tun". This usually resolves by 3½ old.

**Fronting**: using a sound made at the front of the mouth (p/b/t/d) instead of one made at the back (k/g), e.g. saying 'key' as "tey", or 'dog' as "dod". This usually resolves by around age 4.

**Weak syllable deletion**: making a longer word shorter, e.g. saying 'banana' as "nana". Children often do this until they are 4.

**Lisping**: saying s/z as /th/, e.g. saying 'sun' as "thun". This is quite common up until around age 4½.

**Cluster reduction**: missing out a sound where there are two or three consonants together, e.g. saying 'spider' as "pider" or 'glove' as "guv". This can happen until between 4 and 5 years old, depending on the sounds.

**Gliding**: substituting r/l/w/y, e.g. saying 'yellow' as "lello" or 'red' as "wed". Gliding usually resolves by 6 years old.

### How clear should my child's speech be?

Generally familiar adults can understand around:

- At 18 months = 25%
- At 2 years old = 50-75%
- At 3 years old = 75 - 100 %
- At 4 years old = 100%