



## Speech Sounds Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

Children may have trouble pronouncing certain sounds as they develop speech. Most children go through predictable stages of speech development, but some sounds can be tricky for them, especially as they grow older. It is important to be aware of the typical milestones and when difficulties may indicate a need for further support.

### **Common sounds children can have difficulty pronouncing:**

#### ➤ **Early Sound Development (Ages 1-3)**

**Consonants:** Early speech often includes only a limited range of consonant sounds, such as /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /m/.

**Vowel sounds:** Vowel sounds like /ay/ and /ee/ are typically acquired early.

#### ➤ **Sound Substitutions (Ages 2-4)**

Children may substitute harder sounds with easier ones. For example:

- /w/ for /r/ (e.g., "wabbit" instead of "rabbit")
- /t/ for /c/ or /k/ (e.g., "tar" instead of "car")
- /f/ for /th/ (e.g., "fin" instead of "thin")

#### ➤ **Common Difficult Sounds (Ages 3-5)**

/sh/ (as in "shoe") can be challenging.

/ch/ (as in "cheese").

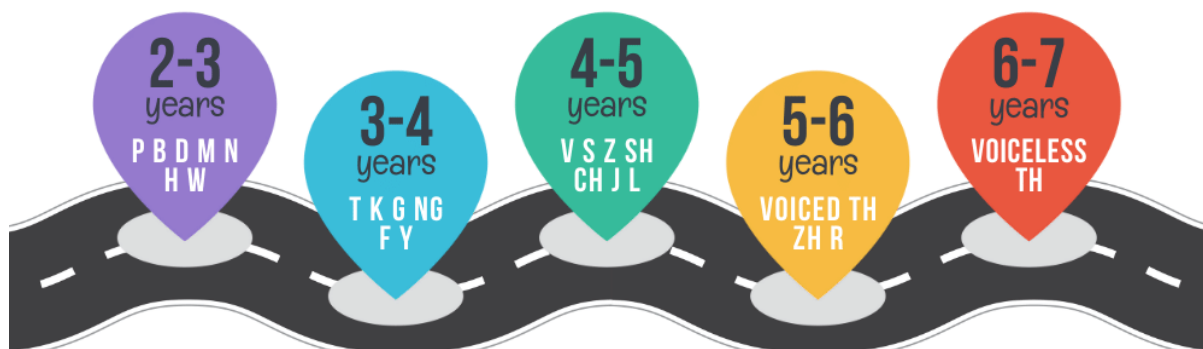
/th/ (as in "think" or "this") often takes longer to master.

/l/ and /r/ sounds can be difficult and may be substituted with a simpler sound (e.g., saying "y" instead of "r").

/s/ and /z/ sounds can be challenging for many children and might be substituted by other sounds.

#### ➤ **Sound Clusters (Ages 4-6)**

Consonant clusters (like /str/, /fl/, and /br/) are more difficult for children to pronounce. They might omit one of the sounds (e.g., saying "tuck" instead of "truck").





## When to be concerned:

While it is normal for children to struggle with certain sounds as they develop, there are times when difficulties could signal a need for professional evaluation:

### 1. By age 3-4

If a child's speech is **unintelligible** to familiar adults, or only a small portion of their speech can be understood, it might be a concern. Struggling with basic sounds like /m/, /p/, and /b/ past age 3 may indicate a delay.

### 2. Persistent errors beyond typical age range

If common errors, such as substituting /w/ for /r/ or /th/ for /f/, persist beyond the age of 4-5, this might suggest a need for further support.

### 3. Lack of progress in speech sound development

If a child does not show improvement in pronunciation by age 5-6 or struggles with more complex sounds, like /r/, /s/, /z/, /l/, /r/, /sh/, /th/ and /ch/, a consultation with a speech therapist would take place and the therapist would determine the next steps.

### 4. Unusual substitutions or omissions

If a child is consistently substituting or omitting sounds in ways that are not typical for their age (e.g., completely leaving out sounds or replacing them with inappropriate sounds), this could be indicative of a speech or language disorder.

### 5. Difficulty understanding or using speech to communicate

If speech difficulties are impacting a child's ability to communicate effectively with others - whether it is understanding others or being understood by others a consultation with the speech and language therapist would take place.





## Tips parents/Carers can use at home to support speech production:

1. **Use a mirror:** Encourage your child to look at their mouth while speaking in a mirror. This helps them see how their mouth moves when producing different sounds and words, improving their articulation.
2. **Flash cards:** Use flashcards with pictures and words to help your child practice pronunciation. You can say the word, then have them repeat it, focusing on clear articulation.
3. **Slow down your speech:** Model slower, clear speech when talking with your child. This allows them to hear the correct pronunciation and rhythm of words.
4. **Read together:** Reading aloud with your child helps them hear new words and practice pronunciation. Encourage them to repeat parts of the story after you, focusing on clarity.
5. **Model correct pronunciation:** If your child mispronounces a word, gently repeat the word correctly without making it feel like a correction. For example, if they say "wawa" for water, you could say, "Yes, water."
6. **Use gestures or visual aids:** Pair words with gestures or visual cues to reinforce meaning. This can help your child understand the context of words and improve speech clarity.
7. **Sing songs:** Singing songs, especially ones with repetitive phrases, can help with rhythm, tone, and articulation. Songs with actions can engage your child even more.
8. **Encourage play:** Engage in pretend play or role-playing games where your child has to use words to communicate. Play kitchens, doctor sets, or store play can stimulate vocabulary and sentence formation.
9. **Expand on what they say:** If your child says something like "car," you can expand by saying, "Yes, that's a big red car!" This helps increase sentence complexity and exposes them to new vocabulary.
10. **Limit screen time:** Encourage more face-to-face interactions and less time in front of screens to promote more verbal communication and social interaction. Consider construction toys, crafting and colouring, puzzles, mind games/teasers as alternatives.

