

Strategies for supporting speech sound development

Typical patterns in speech sound development and strategies

Children develop speech sounds following a typical pattern within typical age ranges. Some sounds are easier to learn and these will develop first e.g., 'm' and others are more complex e.g., 'ch' which will develop later.

As children learn to talk, there will be typical errors with their speech sounds. This is a guide to the typical errors heard in children's speech for children who speak English as their home language. These errors are called 'phonological processes'. Only the most common and typical processes are listed here.

Should you have any concerns about your child's speech sound development, seek advice from a speech and language therapist. This is intended as a guide only.

Mixing up the noisiness of sounds: Some sounds are 'noiser' than others. This refers to whether they are 'voiced'-using the vocal cords, or 'voiceless'- not using the vocal cords. Some children may mix this up and so 'pig' becomes 'big'. This will usually have stopped when the child reaches 3 years of age.

Stopping: Children may make longer sounds e.g., 's', 'f', shorter. This is called 'stopping'. For example, 'fish' and 'soap' become 'tish' and 'dope'. This will have usually stopped by the time the child is 3 years old. Longer sounds such as 'v' and 'z' may also be 'stopped'. For example 'very' becomes 'berry' and 'zoo' becomes 'doo'. With these sounds, this may continue until the child is 3 years and 6 months (3:6).

Missing the ends off words: Children may miss the ends off words e.g., 'ball' becomes 'ba', 'dad' becomes 'da'. This will typically disappear by the age of 3:3.

Fronting: Children may make the sounds usually made at the back of the mouth and make them at the front. For example 'car' would become 'tar'. This will usually have stopped by 3:6.

Consonant harmony; This is where the sounds get muddled in the word e.g., 'mine' becomes 'mime' and 'kittycat' becomes 'tittytat'. This will typically disappear by 3:9.

Missing out the quieter syllable: Children may miss out the quieter syllable in word. This typical process will usually disappear by 4 years of age. For example 'elephant' becomes 'efant', 'potato' becomes 'tato' etc.

Cluster reduction: Clusters are where two sounds are next to each other. Children may say this as one sound rather than two. This is called 'cluster reduction'. For example, 'spider' may become 'pider', 'spoon' may become 'poon', 'clean' may become 'keen'. This will typically disappear by 4 years of age.

'sh', 'j' and 'ch': These are complex sounds to make and children may use an easier sound and make it shorter. For example 'shop' becomes 'dop', 'jump' becomes 'dump', 'chair' becomes 'tare'. This will usually disappear at 4:6.

Gliding: This is when one sound appears to 'glide' into another similar sound e.g., 'leg' becomes 'weg', 'red' becomes 'wed'. This will typically have stopped by the age of 5 years.

Supporting speech sound development

- Singing nursery rhymes
- Making up silly rhymes e.g., The cat has a hat on the mat with a bat
- Clapping out syllables e.g., Ann-a-belle
- Repeat the word and model sounds that are tricky

If a child is having difficulties with a particular sound, repeat the way the word is said to the child. This allows the child to hear the way the word sounds, without any pressure for them to repeat it back. Do not ask the child to repeat the word, unless following advice from a speech and language therapist. e.g., Child: 'dog', Adult: 'yes, it's a frog'

- Play in front of a mirror. Use this to try out tricky sounds and see if your child can copy. Talk about where your tongue is when you make the sound e.g., 'When I say ssss, my tongue is behind my teeth'. If your child is very aware of their difficulties try not to draw attention to them.
- Provide a clear model. Use clear speech so that your child can hear the sounds. Seek advice from a speech and language therapist.

Sources used:

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