



# Speech Sound Development

## An Information Booklet for Parents



Speech is the production of sequences of sounds that make up words.

Children learn how to use speech sounds by listening to the sounds they hear in the languages around them.

Children start by using babbled sounds and then progress to using sounds in words, sentences and conversations.

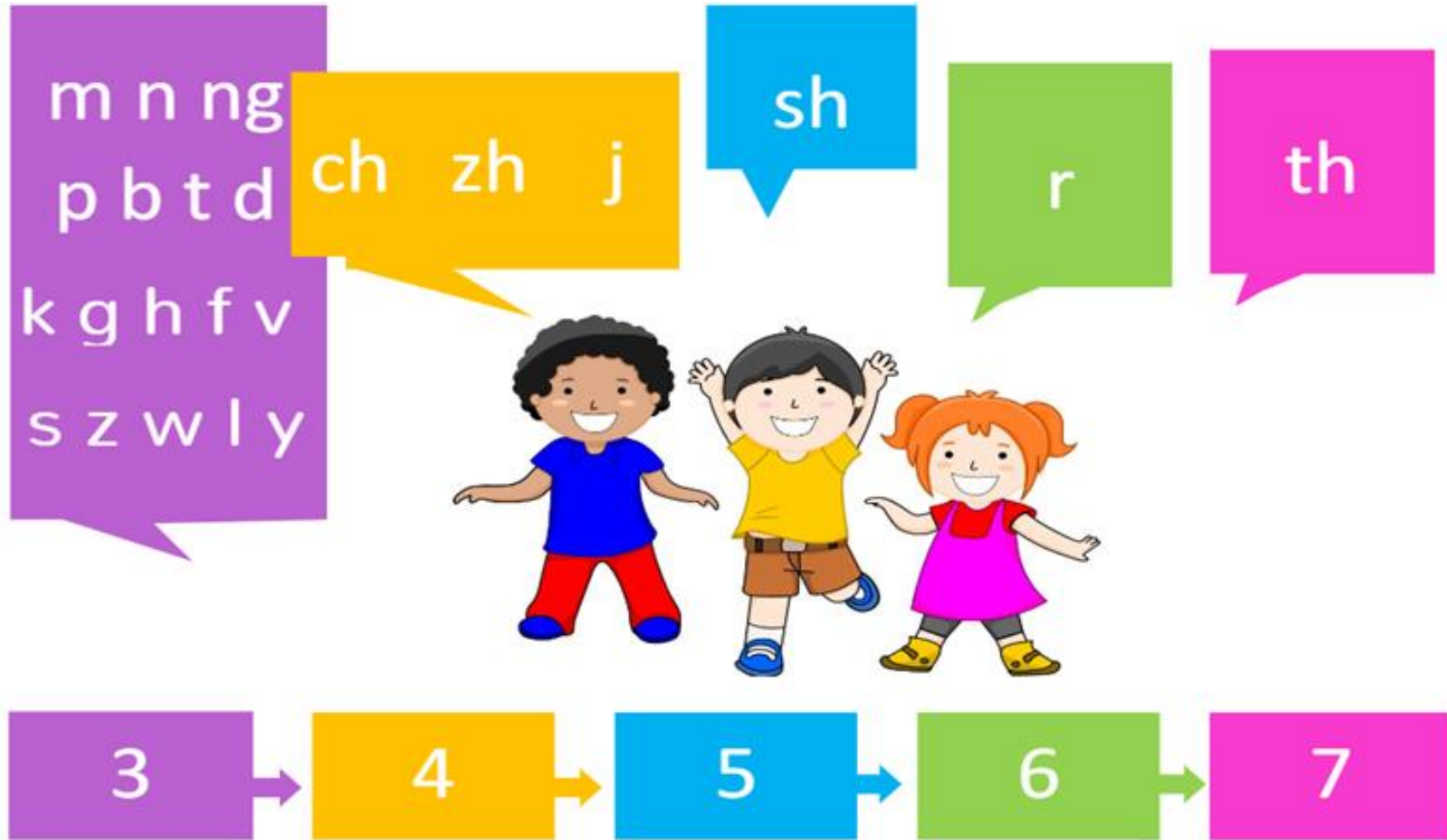
Children's use of speech sounds develops at different ages and they will not be able to use all of the speech sounds adults do straight away.

This information booklet highlights:

- The typical stages of speech development from 3-7 years (Page 2)
- Common speech sound substitutions that children make (page 3)
- Tips for supporting speech sound development (page 4)
- Generalising speech sounds from therapy to every day speech (page 5)



## The Typical Stages of Speech Development from 3-7 years



\*90% of children acquire these sounds at the corresponding ages



**It is common for children to mispronounce words while they are learning.**

**Here are some common things that you might hear your child say:**

What you might hear...	Can be heard until...
Missing off the ends of words e.g. 'hat' is said as 'ha'	3 years old
Replacing sounds made at the back of the mouth (k or g) with sounds made at the front of the mouth (t or d) e.g. 'car' is 'tar' or 'gate' is 'date'	4 years old
Replacing long sounds such as 'f', 'v' or 's' with short sounds such as 't' or 'd' e.g. 'fun' is 'dun', 'sun' is 'tun'	4 years old
Where two sounds are said together, missing one sound out e.g. 'spider' is 'pider'	5 years old
Replacing the sounds 'r' or 'l' with the sound 'w' e.g. 'red' is 'wed', 'leg' is 'weg'	6-7 years old

The above list provides examples of some common substitutions children make in their speech. Every child is different, and for some children, it might take longer to acquire certain sounds than others.

If you are concerned that your child's speech sound skills are impacting negatively on their ability to communicate, it is important that you contact your local Speech and Language Therapy service to seek support.

See Top Tips on how to support your child's speech sound development at home.



## Top Tips for Supporting Speech Sound Development



### Focus on the message

Listen to what your child is saying rather than how they are saying it and always respond to their message.



### Be Sympathetic

Take the blame if you can't understand e.g. 'Mammy's listening ears weren't switched on' or 'Sorry, the TV was turned up too loud'.



### Model Clear Productions

Repeat what your child has said correctly. Don't ask your child to say the word properly, simply provide them with a good model of the word.



### Cue Others

Cue in unfamiliar listeners e.g. if your child is talking about a trip to the zoo and it is clear the listener is struggling to understand, you could say 'oh, you're telling Granny about our trip to the zoo and the lions we saw'. This ensures that your child is part of the conversation.



### Try to work it out

If you can't understand, ask your child to show you what they meant, or ask specific questions that might clue you in. If you can't understand, end the conversation helpfully e.g. 'maybe we'll work it out later'



### Slow Down

Slowing your own rate of speech will allow your child to hear clear models of speech sounds and will encourage your child to reduce their pace also, which can sometimes make their speech easier to understand.

Information informed by:

<https://www.hacw.nhs.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jjm4n1177.pdf&ver=2130;>

[https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/activities-to-Encourage-speech-and-Language-Development/;](https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/activities-to-Encourage-speech-and-Language-Development/)

[https://nhsforthvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SLT-Tips-for-Communication-Development-in-Children.pdf;](https://nhsforthvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SLT-Tips-for-Communication-Development-in-Children.pdf)

<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/slt/speech-and-sound-awareness-parents/>



## Generalising Speech Sounds

Many children who attend Speech and Language Therapy find it difficult to use the sounds they have worked on outside of the therapy room. Children can often say a sound during a structured activity when they are focusing on their speech, but it can be much harder to remember to use it in everyday conversation. This process is called 'generalisation'. Generalising a sound to every day speech takes longer and requires lots of practice.

Here are some things that you can try to help your child to generalise their speech sounds.

Take ten minutes in the day to focus on your child's sound. Pick a time e.g. dinner, when everyone in the family has to use the target sound as best they can. During this time only, remind your child to use their sound, and also provide lots of good models. When the ten minutes is up, just continue to model without reminding your child to use the sound.

Remember - only remind your child about one target sound, not every single sound!

Stick post-its or name tags around the house to prompt your child to use the sound!

Offer choices when you notice an error e.g. if your child says 'the tar is moving', say 'the tar or the car?'

Remember not to do this every time you hear a mistake as your child could get frustrated.

Play games to practise using the target sound e.g. I spy, name as many things starting with the sound in 20 seconds.

When reading with your child, pay special attention to the sound.

Information informed by:

<https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/speech-and-language-therapy2/speech-and-language-therapy-toolkit/>

<https://www.humber.nhs.uk/Downloads/Services/Childrens%20therapies/SLT/Speech/Generalisation.pdf>