

## What are Speech Sound Disorders?

Children may say some speech sounds the wrong way as they learn to talk. They learn some sounds earlier, like p, m, or w. Other sounds take longer to learn, like z, v, or th. Most children can say almost all speech sounds correctly by 4-5 years old. A child who does not say sounds by the expected ages may have a Speech Sound difficulties or a Speech sound Disorder.

## Signs of a Speech Sound Difficulty or Disorder

Your child may substitute one sound for another, leave sounds or syllables out, add in sounds, or change a sound. Sometimes children speak inconsistently and the way they pronounce a word can sound different each time. Other children struggle to make their mouth move to form the sounds and they can seem to grope as they try. It can be hard for others to understand the child and you may need to interpret for them.

It is normal for young children to say the wrong sounds sometimes. For example, your child may make a "w" sound for an "r" and say "wabbit" for "rabbit." She may leave sounds out of words, such as "nana" for "banana." This is okay when she is young. It may be a problem if she keeps making these mistakes as she gets older.

The chart below shows the ages when most English-speaking children develop sounds. Children learning more than one language may develop some sounds earlier or later.

<b>By 3 months</b>	Makes cooing sounds
<b>By 5 months</b>	Laughs and makes playful sounds
<b>By 6 months</b>	Makes speech-like babbling sounds like <b>puh, ba, mi, da</b>
<b>By 1 year</b>	Babbles longer strings of sounds like <b>mimi, upup, bababa</b>
<b>By 3 years</b>	Says <b>m, n, h, w, p, b, t, d, k, g,</b> and <b>f</b> in words Familiar people understand the child's speech
<b>By 4 years</b>	Says <b>y</b> and <b>v</b> in words May still make mistakes on the <b>s, sh, ch, j, ng, th, z, l,</b> and <b>r</b> sounds Most people understand the child's speech
<b>By 5 years</b>	Is using most sounds appropriately, r and th may not yet be accurate. Speech should be easily intelligible.

## **Causes of Speech Sound difficulties:**

Many children learn to say speech sounds over time but some do not. You may not know why your child has problems speaking.

Some children have speech problems because the brain has trouble sending messages to the speech muscles telling them how and when to move.

Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS) or Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia (DVD) is not common but will cause speech problems.

Some children have speech problems because the muscles needed to make speech sounds are weak. This is called Dysarthria.

Other associated factors can include prolonged use of soothers, tongue tie as infants and a family history.

Your child may have speech problems if he has

- a developmental disorder, like autism;
- a genetic syndrome, like Down syndrome;
- hearing loss, from ear infections or other causes; or
- brain damage, like cerebral palsy or a head injury.

However, some children have delayed speech development for no obvious reason.

## **Testing for Speech Sound Disorders**

A Speech and Language Therapist, or SLT, can test your child's speech. The SLT will listen to your child to hear how (s)he says sounds, look at how your child moves his lips, jaw, and tongue and see how well your child can hear the sounds said in words. The SLT may also test your child's phonological awareness skills. These skills include syllable detection, rhyme awareness, initial sound judgement and are important for the development of literacy. It is important to have your child's hearing checked to make sure he does not have a hearing loss. A child with a hearing loss may have more trouble learning to talk.

## **Treatment for Speech Sound Disorders**

SLTs can help you or your child say sounds correctly and clearly. Treatment may include the following:

- Learning the correct way to make sounds
- Learning to tell when sounds are right or wrong
- Practicing sounds in different words
- Practicing sounds in longer sentences
- Identifying which words contain which sounds

## **Further Information**

<https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/speech-sound-disorders>