

# Talking Matters

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 Helping your child to reach their potential



## What is a speech sound difficulty?

Speech sound delays or disorders are diagnosed when there are problems with the way a child uses sounds in their speech. Sometimes the sounds are not produced and other times they are not produced correctly or are not used correctly in words. Most children who are developing sounds as expected can be understood by strangers by three years of age and typically reach an adult level of speech sound use at around 7 to 8 years.

As children learn to talk like adults, they have predictable differences in the way they use sounds when compared to adults. While most children follow these predictable patterns, some children are slower to learn the adult forms, and may have a speech sound delay. For example children have difficulty as 3 year olds saying clusters of sounds (e.g. 'drink' would become 'dink', 'frog' would become 'fog' etc.). However if a child continues to do this when they are 4 years of age it would be considered a speech sound delay.

Other children say sounds in words in a way that does not follow the typical patterns of speech development. For example, a child who leaves beginning sounds off words so that 'dog' becomes 'og' or 'cat' becomes 'at' is not following the expected pattern of development and is considered to have disordered speech. Children with disordered speech can be especially hard to understand at times.

There are a number of different types of speech sound disorders and these require different treatment approaches. Speech pathologists are able to determine the type of speech sound difficulty your child has and advise the best treatment to get your child back on track.

Children need to practice a range of sounds so they can learn to string them together into words. Children need to hear sounds many times before they are able to try and make them. Below are some guidelines of when sounds typically develop so you know which sounds your child needs to be hearing the most.

### Typical ages for sounds to develop are

- 3 years – m, n, h, p, w, d, g, y, k, f, b, t
- 4 years – sh, ch, j, l, s
- 5 years – r, v
- 6 years – z
- 8 years – th



An assessment is recommended if your child:

- Is not using the sounds listed above by the expected age.
- Is hard for parents to understand at age 2 years.
- Is hard for strangers to understand at age 3 years.
- Leaves many sounds off the beginning of words from age 2 years.
- Leaves sounds off the ends of words from 2 ½ years.
- Uses only a few sounds e.g. many sounds replaced with "d" after 2 1/2 years.
- Has an unusual quality in their sounds when speaking e.g. nasally or slushy.

Speech therapy is effective in developing correct speech patterns and early intervention usually means quicker progress. Children with long term speech difficulties may develop difficulties with learning to read and write at school. Therapy which begins in the toddler or preschool years is recommended.