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Helping your school age child Speech sounds



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There are approximate milestones for learning certain speech sounds, but children typically vary in their speech development.

Children acquire speech sounds gradually. Individual speech sounds are combined in patterns to make words. The patterns start simply and become longer and more complex as a child develops.

The way that a child says a word naturally changes over time as their speech develops and they manage more complex sounds and words. This means that making errors is a normal part of developing clear speech.

Example: the word 'chair' may be produced as "dair", 'spoon' may be produced as "boon", or 'hospital' may be produced as "hobidal."

After a child can say a sound on its own, they generally begin to use it in combination with other sounds in single words, then in a few words together and then gradually in everyday conversation.

Speech development involves other many developmental and skill areas such as hearing, attention, listening to the differences between sounds, getting sounds in the right order, awareness of sounds in words, getting words out smoothly, the rhythm and 'tune' of how we speak, vocabulary, and co-ordination,

By the time a child starts school, most of their words are usually clear to others. However many children struggle with talking and may continue to find it difficult to say:

- Specific or more complex sounds
- More complex sound combinations
- Longer words with lots of syllables

Identifying a child's speech needs as early as possible is important. Persisting, unclear speech may affect social confidence and the sound awareness required for the development of reading and spelling skills.

If you are concerned about your child's speech, seek advice from a qualified speech and language therapist.

This leaflet offers general ideas of how you can help your child's speech development.

Help your child's speech

Please adapt suggestions to take account of your child's age and stage of development.

Listen to *what* your child says, instead of how they say it.

Repeat back the words the child says correctly so that he/she hears good examples. For example: Child "Bid boon" Adult: "Big spoon. Yes, I need the big spoon."

Avoid

- asking your child to say the words again
- asking your child to slow down
- correcting your child
- pretending to understand what he/she says to you.

If part of your child's conversation is understood, repeat back the known words to show what you *have* understood.

Slow down *your own speech* slightly to encourage your child to use a slower rate. This is more effective and less frustrating than asking your child to slow down.

If you don't understand what your child has said, ask your child to show you, point to or mime their message. If you still can't understand, reassure your child and perhaps try again later. A home-school book can help to anticipate or establish what your child is trying to communicate.

With an older child who has persisting speech difficulties, encourage them to:

- ✓ Spot when a listener doesn't understand
- ✓ Repeat key words to help a listener understand
- ✓ Pause between chunks of information and wait for the listener to confirm they have understood
- ✓ Use gesture or show what is meant
- ✓ Persist and not give up.

Activity ideas

Support the underlying skills that influence speech development such as listening and developing your child's awareness of sounds in words.

For listening skills

(See the Helping your school aged child to listen leaflet).

Develop your child's awareness of sounds in words.

a) Rhyme

In this leaflet, rhyme means a word that has the same sounds at the end as another word, for example, *cat*, *mat*.

It also means a short poem in which the sound of the word endings on one line matches up with the word endings at the end of another line.

For younger children: sing nursery rhymes and leave out the last rhyming word. Can your child finish off the rhyme?

For older children, make up silly rhymes or play rhyming I spy: "I spy with my little eye, something that rhymes with log."

b) Syllables

In this leaflet, syllables, means the 'beats' in a word. For example: 'mouse' has 1 syllable, 'badger' has 2 syllables, 'grasshopper' has 3 syllables.

Chopping up words into syllables by clapping or jumping can help children to say longer words. First clap out the names of family members. Then try favourite foods or animal names. Then choose some words eg: from your child's class topic, take it in turns clap out or jump the number of beats in a topic word. Sort the topic words into piles according to the number of syllables.

c) Sounds

Choose words from a school topic or in a book that you read together, identify the initial sound as well as the meaning. For example: "Volcano...that starts with a 'vvv' sound." Link a word to other words that start with the same sound: "Let's draw other words that begin with 'vvv'...like van."