

Speech Sound Problems

As children learn to talk they often make errors in their speech. Some, but not all are common and are part of normal speech sound development. If a speech sound problem persists or a child is particularly difficult to understand they may benefit from assessment by a Speech and Language Therapist.

The table below shows typical ages for speech sound acquisition.

Between the ages of ...	We would start to work on these sounds
3 – 4 years	p, b, m, n, w, h, t, d
4 – 4 and a half years	y, f
4 and a half to 5 years	k, g, ng (<i>as in “ring”</i>), s
5 to 6 years	v, z, sh, ch, j, s-blends (<i>e.g. “sp” as in “spider” and “st” as in “star”</i>)
6 to 7 years	l, zj (<i>as in “meas<u>u</u>re”</i>),
7 years onwards	r, th

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We have given an age range at each stage, because there is natural variation between children, and we would also always consider each child's circumstances. For example, a 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ year old who is having difficulties with 'k' would be considered for therapy earlier if they have started school already.

If a child has difficulty with a number of sounds, please refer according to the sound that should have been acquired earliest, e.g. it would be appropriate to refer a 3 year old who has difficulties with 'm' and 'k', but not a 3 year old who has difficulties with 'k' and 's'.

We would accept the referral of a child who had reached the age of 2 ½ and could not be understood by his/her parents, and would also consider referrals earlier than indicated by the above table if there is significant parental anxiety.

How to Help

- Try to focus on what your child is saying rather than how they said it.
- Repeat back any speech sound errors correctly without highlighting the problem too

much e.g.

Child: "Look at the putty tat!"

Adult: "Yes, I can see the pussy cat"

- Don't put pressure on your child to make the correct sounds, it may be that he/she

can't make them just yet. It helps just to listen to them.

- Play listening games such as sound lotto, "find that sound" etc.

- Try to spend some structured one-one time with your child completing listening

activities, making silly noises, reading stories together for example.

*The information in this table is a combination of the ages children should have acquired particular sounds, based on the "Healthy Child, Healthy Future" document (used with kind permission from Health & Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland), the assessments used by speech and language therapists, and our own experience working in NHS Borders. This tells us when children are most likely to start benefiting from therapy: