Caring for Your Child
Learning Speech Sounds and Speech Therapy

Talking takes time to develop. Some children are slower at learning to make speech sounds, while other children speak clearly at a young age. Your child may use one sound instead of another, leave out sounds, add extra sounds, or say the sound differently than you might expect as he learns to talk. The following chart shows the age ranges when children can typically make different speech sounds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Age</th>
<th>Sounds Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By 2 years of age</td>
<td>p, b, m, n, h, d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 3 years of age</td>
<td>k, g, t, f, w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 4 years of age</td>
<td>kw (as in “queen”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 5 years of age</td>
<td>ch, j, l, s, sh, y, bl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 6 years of age</td>
<td>r, v, br, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, kl, kr, pl, st, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 7-8 years of age</td>
<td>z, sl, sp, sw, th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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If your child needs speech therapy, talk to the speech therapist often so you can understand what is happening in therapy. The goals and plan of therapy will often change as your child finishes each step and his speech gets clearer. Even if your child has therapy a few times each week, practice at home is needed for success. It is important to take time each day to review and practice the sounds that are practiced in therapy. Give many chances each day for your child to hear and say the sound(s) correctly. Your child needs practice to learn new speech sounds so that these new lip and tongue positions become easier and more automatic.

Adults make some mistakes when talking and then quickly correct the mistakes without even thinking about it. It takes time for your child’s speech to change and for your child to be able to correct mistakes when he talks. These skills can rarely be changed in one or two speech therapy sessions.

Focus homework only on sounds that your therapist has started in therapy so it is less confusing for your child. For example, if your child is working on the /l/ sound in therapy, try not to correct other sounds when your child speaks. Also, if your child is working on the /l/ sound only in words, do not correct the /l/ sound in sentences or conversation yet.
Your therapist will tell you which sounds to practice and in which part of the word (in the beginning, middle, or end) at a given time. Speech sound therapy works on speech sounds, and not letters of the alphabet, since some alphabet letters can be pronounced in many ways. For example: /s/ as in “soup,” “box,” and “circus,” or “sh” as in “shell” and “station.”

Therapy activities and practice can and should be fun. Talk to your therapist about fun rewards to give when practicing speech sounds. Examples include having your child put pennies in a jar, color pictures, put beads on a string, or put pieces of a favorite cereal in a cup when they make the sounds correctly. Keep your practice time short, such as five minutes or less. If your child gets tired of one game, then try another activity. Talk to your therapist if you are having any problems in working with your child. The therapist can give you new ideas for activities.

Make a picture book of fun and interesting pictures with the sound your child is learning. Talk about the pictures with your child. Stress the sound a little bit when reading the book to model it for your child.

Sing songs and say rhymes that have the sound.

Choose a small group of words that have the sound and use the words throughout the day.

Sometimes the speech therapist may ask you to do activities during your daily routines, such as bath time. This is as important and necessary as drill work, and may be more appropriate for your child.

Talk about making mistakes in your own speech and then correct them with your child. For example, I said, “I turned on the wight. That’s silly, I should fix it and say, I turned on the light.” You can sometimes give your child a choice or a sentence to finish, such as “Is it wight or light?” or "It’s not wight, it’s ____.”

Give your child specific praise for what he is saying correctly. For example, “I love the way you said “soap” with a good /s/ sound.”

If your child says the sound wrong when speaking or having a conversation, repeat the word correctly within the sentence. Never imitate the incorrect way of saying the sound, because it can make your child feel badly. For example, if your child says, “That’s a bun game.” Say, “Yes, that’s a fun, fun game.”

Talk about words and how they mean different things. For example, I wouldn’t say, “A baby bear is a tub” (instead of cub) because that changes the meaning of what I was trying to say.

**STEPS IN SPEECH THERAPY:**

- The sound is chosen by the therapist. For young children, we often use names for the speech sounds. For example, /s/ like a hissing snake and /p/ is the popcorn or lip popping sound. For older children, we would identify this as the “/s/ sound.”
- The sound is practiced by itself and repeated. For example: “s-s-s-s.”
• The sound may then be practiced with a vowel (a-e-i-o-u) after it. For example, “so,” “see,” “say.”
• The sound is then practiced in different places in words (beginning, middle, end). Your child will practice the sound in the same place of a word until they can say it easily and correctly. Then the therapist will teach your child to say the sound in another place of the word.
• If your therapist is working on /s/ in the beginning of words followed by a vowel, do not yet work on s-blends (/s/ with another consonant after it, such as “stop,” “snow,” “smile”).
• After your child can say the sound in words, the therapist will often work on putting simple words into short phrases. For example, for the /s/ sound, “I want a sock,” “silly girl,” or “a yellow gun.”
• Next your child may practice making the sound in sentences. For example, “I like to eat cereal for breakfast.”
• Then, your child may practice saying the sound in longer sentences, paragraphs, and poems (your child can copy you saying these things or they can read if they are old enough).
• The last and toughest way for your child to say his speech sounds is in conversation. Before reaching this step, do not expect your child to be able to use his sounds correctly when talking with you throughout the day. This step often takes much work and time. Your child has to think about what he is saying so that he can try to say the sounds during the day when he talks on his own, which is very hard.

Here are some suggestions if your child is getting speech therapy at school to provide ways to communicate with the therapist:

• Ask the therapist how they will work on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.
• Start a notebook that goes back and forth between school/therapy and home. Notes can tell about your child’s goals, helpful activities to try, and improvements. Add comments daily or weekly.
• Call or email your child’s therapist one time a month to get an update about the therapy program and progress.

Your child can learn to improve his speech in fun and rewarding ways with your help and by working together with your child’s speech therapist.

If you have any questions, please call your child’s speech therapist ____________________.

Written 7/11

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