

Learning About Speech Sounds

Children acquire speech sounds during their preschool years. Some speech sounds develop early (p, b, m, d). Some speech sounds are learned gradually over time (l, r, s). Each child follows their own unique timetable for developing sounds.

Speech sounds are made using tongue and lip positions with movement, air-flow, and the presence or absence of voicing.

What part of our mouth do we use to make speech sounds?

- We use our lips to make: b, m, p, w
- We use our teeth and bottom lip to make: f, v
- We use our tongue tip to make: d, j, l, n, s, t, z
- We use the back of our tongue to make: g, k, r, ng (ing)
- We use the back of our mouth to make: h

Some sounds flow and some sounds are choppy and stop air flow:

- Flowing sounds: m, w, f, v, l, s, z, r, h
- Stopping sounds: b, p, d, j, t, g, k

Some sounds use our voice, some sounds don't:

- Voiced sounds: b, m, w, v, d, j, l, n, z, g, r, ng
- Non-voiced sounds: p, f, s, t, k, h

Some sounds are made in the same place, the only difference is voicing:

- t — d; k — g; p — b; f — v



If a child is slow to develop speech or produces sounds that are noticeably different from children the same age then consult a speech/language pathologist.

Age ranges we expect most children to have developed these sounds

- ◇ **At 2–3 years of age:**
b, d, m, n, p, h, w
- ◇ **At 3–4 years of age:**
f, k, g, t, y, ng (as in wing)
- ◇ **At 4–5 years of age:**
v, s, z, l, ch, sh, j (as in jump)
- ◇ **At 5–6 years of age:**
r, th (as in this), zh (as in equation)
- ◇ **At 6–7 years of age:**
th, (as in thin)

When you don't understand a child...

- ⇒ Guessing is okay! Listen and say back what you think they said.
- ⇒ Have the child say it again—"I didn't quite hear you." or "Say it again please."
- ⇒ Ask the child to "Tell me more" to see if you can get additional word clues.
- ⇒ When you understand part of what they say, let the child know. "You are talking about dinner. What about it?"
- ⇒ Ask the child to "Show me what you are talking about."
- ⇒ Let the child know you don't understand by saying, "I'm sorry. I don't understand." By using "I" you take some of the pressure off the child.

ACT on Speech Sound Development

Create **A**wareness

Cue *S*peech Sounds

Practice **T**arget Sounds



Eau Claire Area
School District
Speech / Language
Department



Speech Sounds Take Time To Develop

Talking with children helps them learn the sounds and words of our language. As children talk, you may notice speech sounds errors. This is to be expected because sounds develop over time. While most children learn to make speech sounds on their own, some children do not. We can't always predict which children will learn speech sounds and which children will need help. That is why it is important to learn how to ACT on speech sound development.

ACT on Speech Sound Development

Awareness

Create speech sound awareness each day when talking with children.

Create Awareness For All Sounds

- **What do you hear? Listen:** Help children hear sounds by encouraging listening and sound play. Adult: "What do you hear. Listen. I hear a truck. Vrrrooom,"
- **Bring whatever you are talking about close to your mouth** to focus child on your mouth. This simple act creates awareness of sounds.
- **Rhyming:** Rhyming words (cat, bat) call attention to sounds inside words. Nursery rhymes bring attention to sound patterns.
- **Same Sound:** Point out words that start with the same sound. Adult: "Book and bear start with b. Listen, bbbook. bbbear."
- **Syllable Clap:** Help children hear word parts by clapping each syllable you say. Begin with one or two syllable words, build up to more syllables (e.g. dog, mommy, basketball).

Create Awareness For Sounds a Child Can't Say Correctly Yet

- **Point to your mouth as you repeat the word:** Child: "Wunch." Adult: points to mouth & says: "Llllunch. You're ready for llunch."
- **Emphasize sounds a child is working on within your own conversations:** Adult: "Look at the snow outside. Hey, snow has the 'sssss' sound. Listen: ssssnow."
- **Emphasize sounds from the child's speech:** Child: "Daddy, you nore." Adult: "I ssssnore? Does mommy ssssnore too?"

Cueing

Adult cues help children learn how to make speech sounds. Cue a child during comfortable speaking moments each day.

When a child says a word incorrectly:

Example: Child says "mile" for "smile"

Adult responds with a strategy that best fits the moment then waits expectantly for the child to say the word again

When a child is in a large group:

- **Provide a good Model** by repeating the word slowly and clearly: Adult says: "Ssssmile."

When a child is just with you or in a small group:

- **Provide a Visual Cue:** Point to your mouth and emphasize the /s/ as you draw your finger away from your mouth and say "Ssssmile."
- **Provide a Verbal Cue:** Adult says: "Close your teeth and say sssssmile."
- **Provide Feedback:** Adult says: "I didn't hear the /sssss/ when you said sssmile."
- **Use a Communication Breakdown technique:** Adult says: "Do you mean "mile" or "ssssmile?"

Visual Cue Suggestions for Specific Sounds

Say "Watch me" or "Look at me" to focus attention to your mouth as you make the child's error sound.

- Hold a finger by lips to cue /m/, /b/, /p/, /t/, /d/
- Point to your mouth and put your tongue between your teeth to cue /l/
- Pull your finger away from your lips to cue /s/
- Point to your mouth and round your lips to cue /sh/
- Place your finger below a cheek bone to cue /r/
- Place your hand in front of your mouth to cue /h/
- Point to your throat to cue /k/, /g/.

Target Sound Practice

Children practice target sounds with an adult as they learn to make their error sounds correctly. Practice every day.

What are Target Sounds?

Target sounds are speech sounds or patterns that a speech/language pathologist has identified as the best sounds for the child to work on during speech practice at home.

How are Target Sounds picked?

The speech/language pathologist will analyze the child's speech errors and identify sounds that will provide the child with the most success during home program practice.

Generally, target sounds are chosen based on:

- **A child's age:** A speech/language pathologist will compare a child's errors with expected speech sound performance for their age.
- **Patterns of error:** Sometimes children exhibit patterns of error. When this occurs, the speech/language pathologist designs activities to target the pattern. Some examples:
 - ⇒ **Consonant sequence reduction:** This occurs when a child leaves out one sound in blends (e.g. st, sp, sm, st, gr, bl or br). Example: Child says "tar" for "star"
 - ⇒ **Fronting:** This occurs when a child uses the front of their mouth to make sounds that are made in the back of the mouth. Example: Child says "tar" for "car"

