

Speech - What to expect and when

This page outlines which sounds a child can be expected to use at a certain age and what types of errors you are likely to hear in their speech. There is a lot of variation in how children develop their speech sounds up until around age 5, though in general parents report the following to be the case:

Age 3 - My child is understood around 50% of the time

Age 4 - My child is understood around 75% of the time

Age 5 - My child is understood around 90% of the time



The sounds a child is expected to be able to use:

Age 2-3 years: p, b, m, d, n, h, t, k, g, w, ng, f, y

Age 4 years: l, j, ch, s, v, sh, z

Age 5 years: r, zh (as in measure), th (voiced as in 'the')

Age 6 years: 'th' (voiceless as in 'breath')

Common patterns

Children's development of their speech sounds typically follows an expected pattern and most children will make the following sound substitutions:

Up to the age of 3 children may still be doing the following:

- **final consonant deletion:** missing off the last sound of their words e.g. 'ha' instead of 'hat'.
- **fronting:** the sounds made at the back of the mouth (k / g) are changed to sounds made at the front (t / d) e.g. They say 'tar' for car; 'det' for get.
- **stopping:** Where 'short' sounds (e.g. p, t, d) are used instead of 'long' sounds (e.g. f, v, s, z, sh) e.g. they say 'pish' for fish; 'tun' or 'dun' for sun; 'doo' for shoe.
- **voicing:** where quiet sounds (p / t / k / s) are replaced by loud sounds (b / d / g / z) e.g. they say 'bea' for pea, 'dable' for table, 'gar' for car.



Up to the age of 5 children may still be making these substitutions:

- **cluster reduction:** missing off one sound where two or more consonant sounds occur together
e.g. they say 'nake' or 'sake' for snake, 'poon' or 'soon' for spoon, 'cool' for 'school'.
- **gliding:** where 'r' is said as 'w' e.g. they say 'wabbit' for rabbit, 'wed' for red.

Bowen, C. (2011). Table 3: Elimination of Phonological Processes. Retrieved from <http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/>

McLeod, S. & Crowe, K. (2018). Children's consonant acquisition in 27 languages: A cross-linguistic review. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*. doi:10.1044/2018_AJSLP-17-0100.