

Young children take several years to develop use of speech sounds. It is a gradual process from babbling, to putting sounds together to form words and sentences. Some children will progress more quickly than others. Some have quite clear speech from early on and for others the process is much slower.

Here are some tips to support your child when their use of speech sounds is developing:

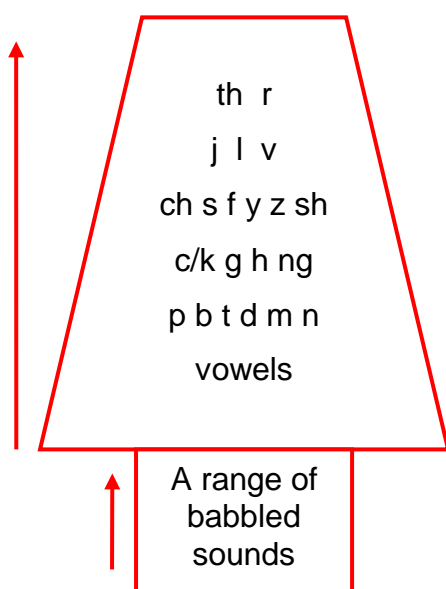
Demonstrate the right way to say a word.

Repeat what your child says, but give a correct speech model, e.g. if the child says: 'Look, a tat!' you say: 'Yes, you're right it's a cat.' Children need to feel relaxed and confident in order to experiment with sounds, so avoid asking them to repeat your pronunciation of words.

Don't pretend to understand. If your child is not clear, try:

- Asking questions.
- Saying "show me."
- Encouraging the use of gesture alongside saying the word.

Here is a rough guide to the pattern of how sounds develop:



It's also useful to know that:

- Children may be able to say a sound, but not use it in words. This is quite normal, e.g. a child may say 's' on its own but say 'tock' for 'sock'.
- Some sounds develop much earlier than others. For example, children tend to use sounds such as 'p', 'b', 'm' first and develop other sounds such as 'l', 'r' much later.
- It's common for children to stumble over their words once they start to put phrases together. This is a normal stage, but if it persists for three months or more, you may wish to talk to your health visitor or make contact with your local Speech and Language Therapy Department.
- Many adults may find a child aged under three years difficult to understand, but close family are likely to tune in to their own child.

Having considered the information above, if you are concerned that your child's speech is not developing as expected, talk to your Health Visitor or contact your local Speech and Language Therapy department.