

Speech Sound Development

- ✓ **0 – 5 MONTHS:** Early on, your baby is likely making lots of “reflexive” sounds, such as crying, groans, grunts and hiccups. By 4 months, your child has more control over the sounds they can make and you might hear vowel sounds you can recognize, like “ooo” or “eee.” Your baby is also trying more consonant sounds, like “m,” “n,” “p” and “h” and combining them with vowels: “ma,” “puh.”
- ✓ **6 – 12 MONTHS:** By the time they are toddlers, most children can produce a few different consonant and vowel sounds. The most common “early” consonants are: “b,” “m,” “p,” “n,” “h,” “w.”
- ✓ **12 – 24 MONTHS:** Baby is playing around with the sounds they can make and you will hear lots of “babbling,” combinations and repetitions of sounds, some of which can start to sound like words, like “mama,” “nana,” “pup,” “wa-wa,” “moo,” “baba.” Most children are able to say about 50 different words by the age of 2.
- ✓ **2 – 3 YEARS:** By 3, most children have mastered the early sounds, and sometimes “d,” “t,” “k” and “g.” By 3, people outside of your family can probably understand about 70% of what your child says. A lot of sounds are still just too difficult, like “s,” “f” and “th,” so your child has to use easier sounds instead. You might hear children say “toap” for “soap,” “wed” for “red” or “dis” for “this.” These are perfectly normal substitutions that many children make as they develop their skills.
- ✓ **3 – 4 YEARS:** By 4, most children can say “k,” “g” and “f,” but sometimes these sounds take a bit longer to learn. Your child may start using “s,” “z,” “l” and “r,” but these sounds are also some of the hardest to master, and some children continue to struggle with them until the age of 5 or 6. By 4, we would expect to understand 80-90% of what your child says.
- ✓ **4 – 5 YEARS:** By 5, some children have very few speech errors and you can understand almost everything they say. However, most will continue to have difficulties with some of the “harder” sounds, such as “sh,” “ch,” “j,” “v” and “th.” You might also notice that your child still has difficulty with some sound combinations, such as “sp” (spoon), “bl” (blue) or “tr” (tree). When your child speaks quickly, like when they are excited or upset, they will tend to make more mistakes.

When should I be worried?

By the time they start Kindergarten, most children will still have a few speech sounds that they struggle with. Most of the time, they develop these sounds on their own. It can be a concern if your child has many sound errors and it is difficult to understand what they are saying—for example, if you find you often have to “translate” for your 4 or 5 year-old when they speak to people outside of the family.

What if my child speaks another language at home?

If the language your child is learning at home is not English, the types of sounds they make and the order in which they are able to make them, may be a bit different. If learning more than one language, there may also be some difference in the types of mistakes your child makes as they learn which sounds “go” with which language. However, learning more than one language will NOT have a negative impact on your child’s ability to learn and make sounds in other languages. As a general rule, by the age of 4, you should be able to understand 80-90% of what your child says in at least one language.

