



Development of speech sounds

Children develop and acquire speech sounds in a pattern over time. The majority of English-speaking children acquire most consonants between the ages of 3-4 years.

The age of acquisition is the age at which a certain percentage of children have developed a speech sound. Please see the table below for more information.

Age of acquisition (90% of children)	Sounds
3 years	p, b, t, d, k, g, m, n, ng, f, s, z, h, w, l, y
3 years and 6 months	ch
4 years	j
5 years	sh
6 years	r
7 years	th (the), th (think)

(Dodd, Holm et al. 2003)

Speech Processes

Children go through a pattern of simplifying sounds when developing their speech. These simplifications are called 'phonological processes' and are usually a part of typical development.

Typical phonological processes are:

Phonological process	Definition / example	Approximate age the process finishes
Fronting	Sounds made at the back of the mouth are made at the front of the mouth instead. e.g. 'c <u>a</u> r' is said 't <u>a</u> r' and 'g <u>i</u> rl' is said 'd <u>i</u> rl'.	3 years 6 months
Gliding	'l' and 'r' sounds are replaced with 'w' and 'y' sounds. e.g. 'r <u>a</u> bbit' - 'w <u>a</u> bbit', 'r <u>e</u> d' - 'w <u>e</u> d'.	5-6 years
Stopping	Long sounds ('f, v, s, z, sh') are replaced with short or 'stop' sounds ('b, p, t, d, k, g') e.g. 's <u>u</u> n' - 'b <u>u</u> n', 'f <u>i</u> re' - 'b <u>i</u> re'	3 years 6 months-5 years

Deaffrication	'ch' and 'j' sounds are replaced with long sounds (e.g. 'sh', 's'). e.g. ' <u>ch</u> ips'-' <u>sh</u> ips'.	5 years
Consonant harmony	A sound is replaced with another sound in that word that is the same or similar. e.g. 'bu <u>s</u> '-'bu <u>b</u> ', 'do <u>g</u> '-'do <u>d</u> '.	3-4 years
Final consonant deletion	The final consonant of a word is omitted. e.g. 'ca <u>t</u> '-'ca', 'boo <u>k</u> '-'boo'.	3 years
Cluster reduction	The consonant cluster (two consonants together) is reduced to one consonant. e.g. ' <u>f</u> lower'-' <u>f</u> ower', ' <u>cr</u> ab'-' <u>c</u> ab'.	4 years 6 months
Weak syllable deletion	The weak syllable is omitted. e.g. ' <u>ba</u> na <u>na</u> '-' <u>na</u> na'.	4 years

(Adapted from: Bernthal et al. 2013 and Grunwell & Dodd 1992).

All phonological processes should have disappeared by 6 years and 11 months. Not all phonological processes are a part of typical development.

The Speech and Language Therapist will be able to identify if your child is not following this normal pattern of development

