

## Speech and Language Therapy Department

# Helping Children with Unclear Speech

Children speaking English often do not have a fully developed sound system until they are 7 years old, therefore many children entering school may have unclear speech.

### Normal Sounds System Development

Approximate Age	Consonants Used	Description of Speech	Example
9 months ↓ 2 ½ years	<b>m, n</b> <b>p, b, t, d</b> <b>w</b>	Parts of words repeated: <b>bibi</b> for biscuit and <b>dada</b> for Daddy  end sounds missed off words; <b>ba</b> for ball	dada 
	<b>(maybe k and g)</b>	more recognisable words  <b>k</b> and <b>g</b> not used all the time, may be produced as <b>t</b> or <b>d</b>  Sounds at the ends of words still missed off. For example, cat becomes <b>ca</b> or <b>ta</b>	tar 
↓ 3 ½ years ↓ 4 years	<b>k, g</b> <b>f, s</b> <b>'ng'</b> <b>y, h</b>	<b>k</b> and <b>g</b> used in words  <b>f</b> and <b>s</b> used in some words  end sounds can still be missed off	tea-tie 
	<b>l</b>	most words now have a sound at the end but not always the adult sound; for example fish is said <b>fiss</b>  <b>f</b> and <b>s</b> used, but not " <b>sh, th, ch,</b> or <b>j</b> "	fis 
	<b>v, z,</b> <b>sh, ch,</b> <b>j</b>	<b>ch</b> and <b>j</b> used  not yet using <b>th</b> or <b>r</b>  where there are two consonants together as in <u>s</u> now – only one sound may be used	A noman wif a wed garf and fibe buttons 
↓ 7 years	<b>r</b>	some children still have difficulty with <b>th</b> and <b>r</b>	Please can I have de gween one? 
	<b>All consonants and vowels used</b>	<b>Mature pronunciation of most sounds</b>	

Reference: Dodd et al (2002)

If a child is not using certain sounds, it is usually because they are not sure how or when to use them.

## How Can You Help?

- Listen to the child and respond positively to their attempts even though they may not be clear.  
The more time you spend listening to a child with unclear speech the easier you will find it to Understand **them**.
- Be a good model – children will attempt to match the models of speech they **hear** so keep your speech slow and relaxed.
- If a word is not clear, let the child hear you say it, without expecting them to repeat it. For example: “There’s a tup”, you say “That’s right it’s a **cup**”.
- Avoid correcting the child’s speech. Getting them to say it properly has little long term **effect** but it can cause a loss in the child’s fluency and confidence in their ability to communicate.
- Concentrate on what the child is saying not how he/she is saying it.
- Reduce the pressure on the child to speak i.e. **try not to** ask too many questions or request the child to “say” or “tell”.
- Encourage the child to look directly at you whilst s/he is talking. Facial expressions can provide a big cue.
- If the child is confident offer a choice, did you say “cup” or “tup”?
- Also encourage **the** use of gesture, showing or drawing pictures and symbolic noises. For example the cow says “moo”.

