



I can't understand my child - Is this okay???

As children learn to talk, it is quite normal to initially not understand everything they say. Here are some general guidelines as to how much parents should understand of what their child says at different ages:

- By 18mths understand about 25% of a child's speech
- By 24mths understand about 50 -75% of a child's speech
- By 36mths, understand 75-100% of a child's speech

Lynch, Brookshire & Fox (1980), p. 102, cited in Bowen (1998).

From 3 years of age, it is expected children should be able to produce certain sounds correctly. There are two main types of speech errors. The first is articulation errors, where a child physically does not know how to produce a specific sound. The second error is a phonological error, where a child can produce the sound by itself (eg. 'c') but substitutes a different sound in words, while they are still learning about how sounds go together (eg. *tat* for *cat*).

Sometimes children may also produce unpredictable or unusual speech errors. Speech pathology intervention is recommended in these situations at any age. For example:

- Deleting the initial sounds in words (eg. *og* for *dog*)
- Producing front sounds as back sounds ie. 'p, b, d, t' → 'k, g' (eg. *gear* for *bear*)
- Sounds that don't sound like English sounds
- Producing the same word different ways (eg. *bap, apa, appo* for *apple*)

Some children may also experience difficulty in sequencing multiple sounds together to produce words. This is related to coordinating motor movements and can become more obvious with longer words (eg. *hippopotamus, elephant, umbrella, helicopter*).

If a child is not yet producing a sound beyond the age when it is expected to be accurately produced (see opposite), then they may need assistance in learning how to produce some of these sounds. If the errors persist and are left untreated, it may impact on a child's ability to learn to read and spell, as well as their social interactions with friends.

What sounds should be produced when?

The following list shows when 75% of children are able to produce each sound and they should no longer be using sound substitutions.

18mths – 3 yrs

Producing a variety of consonants in different words.

By 3yrs

Sounds – *h, m, n, w, y, b, p, t, d, k, g*

By 3 ½ years

Sounds – *f*

Not deleting end sounds (eg. *ca* for *cat*)

By 4 – 4 ½ yrs

Sounds – *l, sh, ch, s, j, z*

Producing consonant blends (eg. *bl, sp, st, fl*)

Not deleting a syllable in longer words (eg. *ephant* for *elephant*)

By 5 yrs

'r' sound

By 6 yrs

'v' sound

By 8yrs

'th' sound

If you're concerned about your child's speech or language development, contact a speech pathologist to discuss whether assessment for your child is indicated.



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