

# Speech sounds

Speech sounds refers to the way we say words and how clear they are. While children are learning to talk they often make some errors with their speech sounds. This is really normal! Speech sounds build on top of all the other areas of communication. This includes play, attention and listening, understanding and talking. Speech sounds are a bit like the cherry on the top of the cake! As children develop their range of sounds increases.

Some children might need some extra help with this area of communication. They might be speaking in sentences but can be difficult to understand. Perhaps there are some sounds that they miss out or swap in words:

Here are our **five top tips** to help a child with their speech sounds:

## 1. Be honest if you don't understand and take the blame

It's easy to pretend you understand, or that you didn't hear. This can be more frustrating for children, particularly if it happens often. Instead, admit you didn't understand. For example: *"I'm sorry, I didn't get that"*.

## 2. Use other methods: 'can you show me?' or 'can you tell me something about it?'

This can sometimes help you to understand what a child is saying. This helps to show the child that you are interested in what have to say. It also helps to show them that you want to work together to understand what they have said. This supports their confidence. We want to make sure they always feel they can have a go at saying something, even if they aren't understood all the time.

## 3. Fill in the blanks

Sometimes you have understood the gist or the topic of what a child wants to say, but not the detail. To help them from having to repeat the whole thing again, you can tell them what part you did understand. For example: *"You're telling me about the garden...did something happen outside?"*

## 4. Repeat back words clearly, but don't correct

When a child has said a word with some errors repeat it back to them using the correct sounds. This helps to show them that you have understood what they have said. It also helps to build their awareness of sounds. Through time, this will support them to change their own productions of words.

It can be tempting to correct them, or ask them to say it again properly. This can be a bit frustrating for children. Hearing an adult say the word with the correct sounds is enough at the moment.

## 5. Clap out syllables in longer words

Breaking a word down into small parts helps to build awareness of the sounds in the words. Over time this helps children begin to say sounds in different ways. You could try clapping out the syllables in words. For example: trac – tor, ba – na – na, cat – er – pil – lar



You can check out our video talking about our five top tips to help speech.  
Scan the QR code.