

Assessing Children's Speech Sounds



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What is this game for?

It is perfectly normal for children to muddle up their sounds as they learn to speak. In the very early years children substitute one sound for another, and sometimes it is difficult for anybody but close family to understand them.

But by the time they go to school children should have most of their sounds sorted out. But a few children still continue to muddle sounds up.

You could see if a child can copy sounds after you. Some children can't even copy some of the sounds.

But even if a child can copy sounds after you, he still may not put it in the right place in everyday speech. For example, a child who says "pinger" for "finger" may appear to not be able to pronounce "ffff", but when asked to say "thumb" he says "fum". Clearly it is not that he can't say "ff" it is that he can't work out which words to put it in!

These pictures are designed so that you can hear the child say all the sounds of English at the beginning of words, and many of them at the end too. You can then work out where the problem lies, and how to put it right.

What to do

Ask the child to name each picture, and record what he says on the chart below:

	Stimulus picture	What child said	Circle the sounds he has difficulty with		
23	bed		b		d
24	bib				b
11	bus		b		s
15	butter		b	t	
9	chair		tch		
4	cup		k		p
7	dog		d		g
17	fish		f		sh
1	gate		g		t
21	leaf		l		f
10	man		m		n
16	measure		m	zh	
14	nose		n		z
2	pea		p		
18	ring		r		ng
8	shoes		sh		z
5	sock		s		k
6	tea		t		
19	teacher		t	tch	
3	thumb		th		m
22	van		v		n
12	watch		w		tch
20	yellow		y	l	
13	zoo/zebra		z		

Notice that some sounds are made at the back of the mouth (e.g. k, g) and some at the front of the mouth, with the tongue tip (e.g. t, d)

Now let's look at what he is doing with his sounds....

- If he is substituting back sounds with sounds at the front of the mouth e.g. t,d this is called "fronting"
An example would be if he says "tup" for cup, and "dod" for dog. Children normally grow out of this by the time they are about 3, and nearly all children have got this sorted out by age 4.
- If he is substituting sounds made at the front of the mouth (t,d) with sounds at the back of the mouth (k,g) this is called "backing"
An example would be if he says "gog" for dog, and "kea" for tea.
Children normally grow out of this by the time they are 3, and nearly all children have got this sorted out by age 4.
- Another common difficulty for children is when they substitute a long, fricative sound such as *ssss*, *zzzz*, *ffff*, *vvvv* with a short, explosive sound such as *t*, *d*, *p*, *b*. (You can feel short explosive sounds on the palm of your hand as you make them). An example would be "pinger" for finger, or "teatide" for seaside.
This is called "stopping" and children normally grow out of this by about age 4.

What to do next

Clear instructions about how to put each of these difficulties right, and games and activities to do with the child are on the Speak Clearly1 and Speak Clearly2 Teaching Tools, also available from Speak Clearly Ltd. Some children have particular problems when there are two sounds together – sp, st, sn, sl, sk
They may pronounce "snail" as "nail", "spider" as "pider" and "sleeve" as "leeve". You can find Teaching Tools to help with this on the "Spiders and Snails" CD, also available from Speak Clearly Ltd.