

TALKING SENSE: WHEN TO INTERVENE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY CHILD'S SPEECH?

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HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN IS THE 'RIGHT TIME' TO INTERVENE IN OUR CHILDREN'S SPEECH DEVELOPMENT OR WHEN DO WE LEAVE OUR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP THEIR SOUNDS IN THEIR OWN TIME?

As parents it is easy to go into comparison! We compare our children's speech with their same aged peers, with a sibling at the same age, or with the 'developmental books' to get a sense of 'is my child 'normal?' We look to see if our children's pronunciation of sounds is comparative, if they are meeting the 'milestones' and look for signs of something not being 'quite right.' But as we know, each child is an individual and develops independently of the 'norms' - thus parents are often left wondering whether their child needs extra support or not.

As with walking, crawling and introducing solid foods, there are milestones that indicate when children are expected to have developed certain sounds. For example, according to research presented in America in 2001 by Goldman, Fristoe and Williams, around 85% of children are correctly producing the 's' sound in their everyday speech between the age of five and five years, five months. However, many children develop the 's' sound earlier and some later.

These milestones can be a useful guide, as they tell us the age by which the majority of children are using each sound, as well as consonant blends (two consonants that appear together e.g. 'br'). However, the milestones are only one part of the picture and it is recommended they be used as a guide and not a rulebook.

THE APPROXIMATE AGE BY WHICH CHILDREN ARE EXPECTED TO HAVE DEVELOPED SPEECH SOUNDS

Age	Sounds typical for this age
3 yrs	m, n, h, w, p, b, t, d, k, g, ng, f, y, j, most vowel sounds
4 yrs	l, sh, ch, many consonant clusters (e.g. 'sp')
5 yrs	s, z, j, r, more consonant clusters (e.g. 'scr')
6 yrs	v
8 yrs	th

Sometimes other factors can influence speech sound development such as starting to talk late or illness such as ear infections that contribute to periods of reduced hearing. Both these factors can influence when children develop certain sounds and in some cases, children go on to develop all of their sounds appropriately, just a little bit later than their



peers. Equally, some of these children will need support to develop some of their speech sounds appropriately or to speed this process up so they can be more easily understood.

So, when do we leave a child to develop their speech sounds naturally and when do we intervene? The best way to decide is to be guided by the child.

THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST CAN SUPPORT YOU IN DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT YOUR CHILD WOULD BENEFIT FROM HAVING THEIR SPEECH ASSESSED BY A SPEECH PATHOLOGIST:

- Has the child passed the age by which a sound is typically developed? The speech sound milestones can help determine this.
- Can your child repeat a sound they are having difficulty with in isolation as well as in words? If so, then they are more likely to develop this sound independently in the near future.
- Is your child's speech causing them to feel frustrated or not understood by others? If so, their speech may be impacting their confidence, as well as their social development and ability to demonstrate their learning to teachers at kindergarten or school.

If you are not sure whether intervention is needed, it is recommended that you seek an assessment from a paediatric speech pathologist (also known as a speech therapist). A speech pathologist will be able to determine whether your child would benefit from intervention and if so, teach them to produce the sounds that they can't say and integrate them into their conversational speech.

So, the simplicity remains that when we observe our children and the relationships they have, they themselves - through their behaviours and experiences of life - will often tell us when support is required. If in doubt, a paediatric speech pathologist can support you in making this decision.

Reference: Goldman, R, Fristoe M, Williams, K: *Goldman Fristoe Test of Articulation 2 – Supplementary Developmental Norms (2000)*, Pearsons: Minneapolis

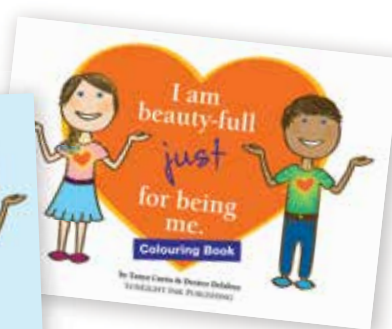
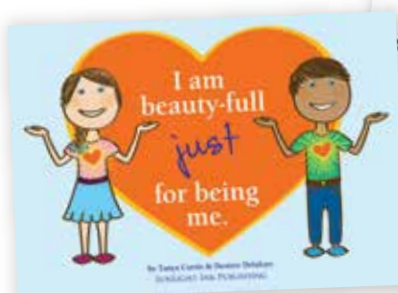
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