



**Let's  
Talk**

# Speech Sound Disorders

“Our daughter Molly is turning 4 this month, and no one can understand what she says. She talks a lot and tries to tell us what she wants, but she has to point to be understood. We're worried about how she'll manage in preschool.”

—Lydia and Sheldon

Children start to learn speech with babbling during their first few months of life. Your child starts to put sounds into words by the time she has her first birthday. Children learn speech sounds as they grow. It is important to remember that children develop speech at different rates.

## What Is a Speech Sound Disorder?

A speech sound disorder means a child has problems saying some sounds. This may make it hard for people to understand what the child is trying to say.

Young children will make speech errors as they learn. This is okay. Children who continue to have problems may have a speech sound disorder, or articulation or phonological disorder. It is not a speech disorder to speak with an accent or dialect.

## What Causes a Speech Sound Disorder?

Most speech sound disorders have no known cause. Young children who have a lot of ear infections might have problems hearing speech sounds. A hearing loss can make it hard for children to hear certain sounds. This can cause a speech sound disorder. This is why it is important to get your child's hearing checked.

### Fast facts

- Children learn speech sounds as they grow.
- Most speech disorders have no known cause.
- All speech sounds should be developed by age 8 years.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.

### When Do Children Learn Their Sounds?

Most children who are learning English say sounds and speech patterns by these ages:

#### By 2 years

- Uses sounds *p, t, k, b, d, g, m, n, w, y,* and *h*
- Says word endings, such as the *t* in *cat* (although substitutions may occur)

#### By 3 years

- Uses *k, g, f,* and *s* sounds (although *s* may sound funny)
- Uses consonant clusters/blends, such as *st* in *star*
- Is understood by family and friends most of the time

#### By 4 years

- Says all of the sounds in words, except in longer words, such as *paghetti* for *spaghetti*
- Is understood by family, friends, and strangers almost all of the time

#### By 6 years

- Uses *v, l,* and *r* sounds appropriately and other *s*-family sounds including *z, sh, ch,* and *j*

#### By 8 years

- Uses *th* sounds
- Produces *s* and other similar sounds appropriately (without distortions or lisps)
- Has “adult-like” speech

By age 8, children should be able to produce all sounds correctly in sentences and when reading out loud.

Children who are learning languages other than English may not follow the same pattern.

### What Can I Do to Help My Child?

Always make correct speech sounds for your child. Do not repeat the mistakes your child makes. Read to your child often. The more he hears you speak, the more likely he is to say sounds correctly.



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## When Should I Get Help?

If your child does not make sounds that her friends of the same age can make, there may be a problem. Be sure to have her hearing tested. You should take your child to see a speech-language pathologist, or SLP, if your child

- is not talking by age 2,
- is 3 or older and others have difficulty understanding her.

“Molly had a hearing screening and speech sound testing by a speech-language pathologist who we found through our school district’s Child Find program. Molly got the services she needed free of charge at the school. Now she’s starting to use words we understand. We’re so happy she’s finally receiving help!”

—Lydia and Sheldon

**Speech sound disorders can change your child’s life.  
Help is available.**

To learn more about speech sound development or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org) or call **800-638-8255** or (TTY) **301-296-5650**.

My SLP’s name is

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Appointment

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Compliments of  
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)  
and