



# Speech Sound Awareness

## Why are these skills important?

An understanding of how sounds and words work is necessary to plan how to say a word and to organise the sounds into the right order. These skills need to be in place before individual sounds are targeted

## Children who may need support with sound awareness:

- If there are concerns about speech sounds and clarity, sound awareness activities are a good starting point to develop skills
- If there are concerns about literacy or spelling, listening and sound awareness activities may be beneficial.

## Activities to support sound awareness skills

- Listening to environmental sounds  
Draw attention to and discuss sounds that you can hear in the classroom or playground. Talk about the properties of these sounds; are they quiet or loud? Long or short?
- Breaking down words into syllables  
e.g. **adult:** banana **child:** ba-na-na  
Practise clapping the beats in multi-syllabic words.  
Clap out longer words as you come across them, for example when reading, or play games in small groups with picture cards.
- Blending syllables into words  
e.g. **adult:** ba-na-na **child:** banana  
Play a variant of 'I spy...' where the children have to put the syllables back together to make a word  
e.g. 'I spy with my little eye he-li-cop-ter'
- Recognising rhyme  
Play games where the child has to listen for whether sounds at the ends of words are the same or different.  
Start by offering choices e.g. 'does cat sound like mat or horse?' then move on to matching pairs e.g. 'which ones go together? ; cat; house; mat; mouse'
- Making rhymes  
Once the child can recognise rhymes, support them to think of another word that sounds the same



# GETTING STARTED

Children start to develop their knowledge of speech sounds from an early age. In order to be able to say sounds, a child must have a good understanding of what a sound actually sounds like. A child needs to be able to recognise and tell different sounds apart from one another. This is so that they can make good attempts at saying these sounds in the correct way to be able to communicate with others.

There are three stages to working with speech sounds:

1. Speech Sound Awareness (see section 5-li)
2. Auditory Discrimination (see section 5-lii)
3. Working with Sounds (see section 5-liii)

The table below shows the typical development of sounds based on a child's age. You can use this to see if the child is developing sounds in a 'typical' way.

## Speech Sound Development- Ages and Stages

Age	Speech Sounds
By age 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All common vowel sounds</li> <li>• p, b, t, d, m, n, w</li> </ul>
By age 4 (end of nursery/ preschool)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• p, b, t, d, m, n, w,</li> <li>• k, g, f, h, y (as in yet)</li> </ul>
By age 5 (end of YR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• p, b, t, d, m, n, w,</li> <li>• k, g, f, h, y (as in yet)</li> <li>• s and ng (e.g. sing)</li> </ul>
By age 6 (end of Y1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• p, b, t, d, m, n, w,</li> <li>• k, g, f, h, y (as in yet)</li> <li>• s and ng (e.g. sing)</li> <li>• l, sh, ch, dj, z, v, r, th and zh</li> <li>• sp, sm, sn, sk, sl, sw, st</li> <li>• bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, qu (kw), br, cr, dr, fr, gr, pr, tr</li> </ul>
After age 7 (end of Y2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all the above + str, skr, spl, spr thr, shr</li> </ul>



# ACTIVITIES

## 5L-i- Speech Sound Awareness (SSA)

**\*\*Important- ensure the child's hearing has been checked prior to starting this section\*\***

### Activity 1- Syllable Awareness/ Segmentation

The aim of this activity is to help the child to break down the words into syllables by clapping, tapping and saying the word out loud.

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Video example: start  
00:48- finish 03:10

Further ideas:

- Step up: the child claps it out on their own and add in longer words (e.g. caterpillar)

Step up: Sorting syllables by number

- Step down: you clap out the word with the child.

- Step down: the child listens to an adult clapping the syllables in play or when unpacking the shopping together.



### Activity 2- Blending syllables into words

The aim is for the adult to say the syllables in a word and the child to put the syllables back into the word.

Example 1:

- Adult says 'el-e-phant'.
- Child says 'elephant'.



Example 2:

- Adult says 'cro-co-dile'.
- Child says 'crocodile'.



### Activity 3- Rhyme Awareness

This is an activity to help your child to listen to whether the sounds at the end of words are the same or different. The adult says rhyming and non-rhyming words and the aim is for the child to identify which words rhyme.

Further ideas:

- Step down: If the child is not yet ready to engage in a structured activity, they can listen to the adult talking about rhyming words in play



Video example:  
rhyming awareness

### Activity 4 - Rhyme Generation

Recite nursery rhymes and action rhymes to your child. Once the child is familiar with the rhyme, say a line and then pause before the last word and see if your child will fill in the space.

Further ideas:

- Step up: produce your own rhyme – the aim is for the child to think of an additional rhyming word to match two pictures e.g. cat and rat (a word that sounds the same at the end)
- Step down: offer choices (e.g. 'Was that car or cat?').

Example:

Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily  
Life is but a \_\_\_\_\_



Video example: start 10:17  
– finish 13:43

### Activity 5 - Playing with Sounds

The aim is to link sounds with objects and to encourage the child to practise the sounds in a playful and fun way.

Examples:

- 'v' for the noise of the Hoover
- 't' for a dripping tap
- 'n' for the noise of an aeroplane
- 'g' for water going down the plug



Video example



## Activity 6 - Sound Collecting

Collect objects with the child that begin with the same sound from around the house. Lay them out on a tray or table. Go through them each day with the child.

Tell the child:

1. They all begin with the same sound.
2. What that sound is.
3. The names of the objects.



After a few days, try a different sound. Once the child is familiar and confident with this activity, try to create some rhymes together.

Step up - Try sorting the words by sound (consult your Speech & Language Therapist for guidance on which sounds to use).



Step up- encourage the child to sort word by sound without talking. Prompt them by saying 'don't move your lips'

## Activity 7 - I Spy

'I Spy with my little eye something beginning with 'sssss'.

Make sure you use the sound at the beginning of the word, and not the letter. Beware of words like "photograph" where the clue will be 'f' not 'p'.



## 5L-ii- Auditory Discrimination

This programme is to help the child listen more carefully to some of the sounds we use in speech. Listening to and hearing the difference between the sounds will help the child to develop their own speech.

### 5L-ii(a)- Single Speech Sounds

This activity is to help your child hear the correct production of a single speech sound.

What you will need:

- Phonics picture cards (e.g. Jolly Phonics or Nuffield Sound pictures)
- A fun turn-taking game (e.g. 'pop up pirate' or 'tumbling monkeys').



Have the phonics cards in a pile face down and, before having a turn of your turn taking game, pick a card:

- Talk about the properties of the sound (e.g. 'That was a noisy 'b'/quiet 'p'; long 's' /short 't' sound').
- Prompt the child to look at your mouth when you produce the sound.
- Cued articulation can be used to support the child. Cued articulation provides a visual cue using gesture to represent how different sounds are produced. Ask your Speech and Language Therapist for information about this.

### 5L-ii(b)- Single Words

#### REMEMBER

It is important that this work consists of you doing the speaking and the child doing the listening. The child should not be expected to say the words. If, during these games, the child tries to say the word, accept their version without correcting.

What you will need:

- Paper and pens
- Minimal pairs pictures (these are words which share all but one sound like "key" and "tea" or "car" and "card")
- Phonics picture cards (if you have these available)



Activity:

- You need two piles of the minimal pair pictures, for example 'tea' (5 pictures) and 'key' (5 pictures)
- Present the pictures 'tea' and 'key' to the child.
- Say 'tea' and ask the child to point to the picture of the 'tea'. Do the same for 'key'.
- Now randomly present the pictures to the child and see if the child can point to the one you say or place a counter on it.
- If the answer is incorrect, praise the child for having a try but make sure you model the correct sound (e.g. 'Good try. That was key.')
- You could play a turn taking game (e.g. pop up pirate) alongside to keep the child interested.



## Other activity ideas with minimal pairs:

Place minimal pairs pictures around the room or garden and get the child to run to the one you say.



Take one of the pictures and see if the child can tell if you are saying it right or wrong, for example, for the key picture, ask "is it a tea?" "Is it a key?" "Is it a sea?" etc.

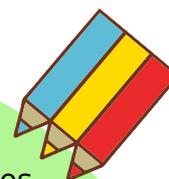


Use small world toys and real objects instead of pictures and ask them to "Find \_\_\_\_"



Listening for mistakes at the end of words

Photocopy several copies of some minimal pairs. See if the child can colour in or place a counter on the picture that you say.



For more activity ideas [click here](#)

### Next steps:

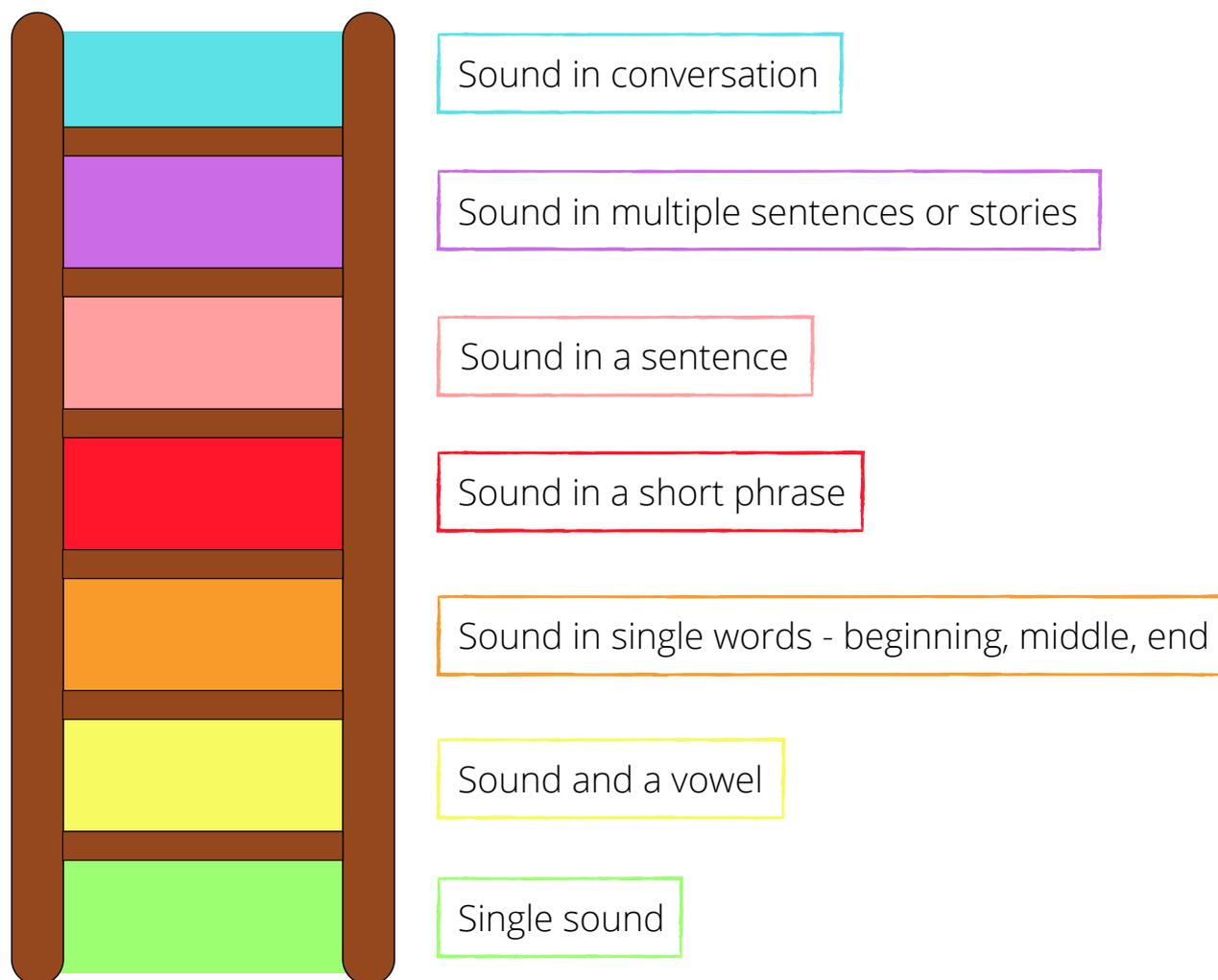
When you have carried out these games and the child is successful at discriminating the correct sounds, you can move on to the 'Working with Sounds' section.



## 5L-iii- Working with Sounds

Following auditory discrimination activities, the child can now work on producing their target sound. This should be completed in a set order and on the direction of a Speech and Language Therapist.

Speech Sound Ladder - This is the order of progression, starting on the bottom rung and working your way up.



### Stage 1 - Single Sounds

Repeat the sound on its own - Use any tips the Speech and Language Therapist has shown you. For example, for /c-k/, open your mouth very wide. When the child can make the sound easily, move on to the next stage. If the child is finding it difficult to say the sound on its own, please contact the Speech and Language Therapy department for further advice.



## Stage 2 – Sound with a vowel

Repeating the sound with a vowel - For the example of /c-k/, practise the production of “kee”, “kah”, “koo”, “kor”. To begin with, it may be helpful to say the /c-k/ sound, pause and then say the vowel sound. As the child becomes more able, reduce the pause. Move on to the next stage when the child can say the consonant and vowel without a pause. If you are working on the /c-k/ sound at the end of words, you may need to practise production after a vowel for example “eek”, “ook”, “ark”, “ork”. Use pictures of aliens and give them names including the target sound.



## Stage 3 – Sound in a word

Repeating the sound in a word - To begin with, choose words with one syllable (e.g. comb, can, cat, cave). When these words are pronounced successfully, move on to longer words (e.g. caravan, castle, kangaroo). When working on sounds at the beginning of words, use words that have a consonant followed by a vowel (e.g. cat). Words that begin with two consonants (blends, or consonant clusters, e.g. crate) develop at a later stage. You do not have to focus on just the beginning sounds, your target sound could be in the middle or end of the words.

**Step up** - Saying the sound in a word: Up until now the child has repeated the sound after an adult. This next stage is for the child to remember to say the sounds correctly without this adult model. Use pictures or objects for the child to name.

## Stage 4 – Sound in a phrase

Saying the sound in a phrase - When the child is able to name the target words accurately, help them to use the sound in short phrases. For example, “a key”, “a big cat”, “driving the car”. At first the child may find it easier to say the target sound correctly when the word containing that sound is the first word of the sentence.

## Stage 5 – Sound in a sentence

Saying the target sound in a sentence - When the child is able to say short phrases accurately, make up longer sentences for them to copy. Take turns, so the child makes up sentences that you copy. You can make up nonsense or silly sentences with lots of words containing the target sound.



## Stage 6 – Sound in multiple sentences or stories

When the child is able to say simple sentences with the target sound you can then progress to saying multiple sentences in a row. Make up a story, with the child “reading” the pictures of the target words. For example, if working on /c-k/, use pictures of a car and a cat and a cake. The story might be: “I went in the car” “I saw a cat” “It ate a cake”.

## Stage 7 – Sound in conversation

By this stage the child should be able to use the target sound within every day conversation. Please contact the Speech and Language Therapist if you require further support or advice.

## Activity ideas

These activities can be adapted to suit any of the above stages

Place sound/word pictures on the floor and say the one stepped on in a “stepping stones” or hopscotch game.

Place dots (from one to six) on the backs of target pictures. Take it in turns to throw a die and turn over the corresponding picture.

Play a simple board game, using pictures of the words. Before you take your turn, choose a picture from the pile and say the word.

Using two copies of target pictures make up a “pairs game”. Take it in turns to turn over two pictures, naming them as you go. The aim is to find a matching pair.

Make a rod with a magnet and some string, put paper clips on the target pictures and play a “fishing game”. Take it in turns to catch a “fish”.

Play a “treasure game” by hiding pretend coins under the target pictures. Take it in turns to turn over a picture, say the word and collect the treasure.

Play “Kim’s game” with 4-5 pictures or objects with the target sound. Take it in turns to close your eyes while the other person takes one away. Name the one which is missing.

Take turns to play a motivating game such as pop-up pirate, hopping frogs, adding a brick to a tower, posting pictures etc. Before having your turn take a picture and say the sound/word



Take it in turns to describe something with the target sound in it for the other person to guess. For example, if working on the sound /c-k/, the clues could be: "It goes on the road, has 4 wheels and you drive it."

Take it in turns to hide pictures or objects containing the target sound around the room for the other person to find. You could use a treasure hunt clue; for example: "It's under something we read". The searcher then has to say what they have found.

#### Picture Sheets for Consonants:

Pictures for working on sounds can be downloaded from the following websites:

- [Speech Therapy Worksheets and Forms | Mommy Speech Therapy](#)
- [Speech Teach UK Picture Cards](#)

[Jolly Phonics and Cued articulation pictures](#)

### Activities for Stage 5+

Have some pictures or objects with the target sound in and take it in turns to give each other instructions and carry them out. For example, when working on /s/, the instructions might be: "Put the sock under your chair" "Hide the sun under the book"

Make up a story, with the child "reading" the pictures of the target words. For example, if working on /c-k/, use pictures of a car and a cat and a cake. The story might be: "I went in the car" "I saw a cat" "It ate a cake"

Make up tongue twisters. Can the child remember them to tell Mum or Dad and then bring a new one to school to tell you?

### Consonant Clusters

Words that begin with two consonants (blends, or consonant clusters, e.g. blue or spoon) develop at a later stage. You may be working on consonant clusters following advice from the Speech and Language Therapy team. Sometimes it helps children to say the cluster by saying the first sound, pausing and then saying the main part of the word e.g. 'sss-pot' for 'spot'. Some children may need to spend some time reducing the pause until the two parts become one smooth word without a pause.

