Speech Development Reference Charts

Sound acquisition ages, phonological process elimination ages, and expected intelligibility by age.

Speech Sound Acquisition Chart

The average age at which children in the United States acquire each English consonant.

6 YEARS — **voiceless th**

The last consonant to be acquired.

5 YEARS — **voiced th, zh, r**

Including consonantal /r/. Vocalic R often lags behind it.

4 YEARS — **v, s, z, sh, ch, j, l**

Fricatives, affricates and /l/ come online.

3 YEARS — **t, k, g, ng, f, y**

Back sounds and the first fricative arrive.

2 YEARS — **p, b, d, m, n, h, w**

The earliest sounds. All are easy to see and feel.

HOW TO READ THIS CHART

These are the ages by which 90% of children in the reviewed studies produced each consonant correctly, averaged across studies (Crowe & McLeod, 2020, 90% criterion). "3 years" means by 3;11. Looser 50% or 75% criteria would place every sound earlier, not later. ASHA's milestones agree with this: p, b, m, h, w, d and n by 3 years, then t, k, g, f, y and -ing by 4, and l, j, r, sh, ch, s, v, z and th are the later-developing sounds (Crowe & McLeod, 2020). A sound is not "late" until the child is past the top of its range.

Source: Crowe & McLeod (2020), a review of 15 studies covering 18,907 children.

Phonological Process Elimination Chart

The age by which each simplification pattern is generally expected to be gone.

Never typical YEARS	**Backing, initial consonant deletion, glottal replacement**

Refer at any age. (A glottal stop for /t/ before a syllabic N - "button" - is normal American English, not glottal replacement.)

By 7;0 YEARS	**Vowelization of /r/**
By 6;0 YEARS	**Gliding of /r/, vowelization of /l/**
By 5;0 YEARS	**Cluster reduction with /s/, gliding of /l/, stopping of th**
By 4;6 YEARS	**Stopping of sh, ch and j**
By 4;0 YEARS	**Weak syllable deletion, cluster reduction without /s/, palatal fronting**
By 3;6 YEARS	**Velar fronting, stopping of v and z**
By 3;3 YEARS	**Final consonant deletion**
By 3;0 YEARS	**Reduplication, prevocalic voicing, final devoicing, stopping of f and s**

HOW TO READ THIS CHART

Treat these as a guide for when a pattern is worth a closer look, not as a cutoff. Individual variation is wide, and the pattern matters more than the date. A process that persists past its usual age is a common reason for referral, even when individual sounds are produced correctly in isolation.

Source: Commonly cited clinical figures, drawn from the phonological development literature rather than a single authority. ASHA does not publish an equivalent table.

How Much Should a Stranger Understand?

A quick, practical screen you can run at the grocery store.

5 YEARS — **Understandable in conversation**

Including with unfamiliar listeners and on unfamiliar topics.

4 YEARS — **Most speech understood**

Occasional words may still be unclear.

3 YEARS — **About 75%**

Most of a conversation is followable.

2 YEARS — **About 50–75%**

Family understands much more than strangers do.

1 YEARS — **About 25%**

Roughly one word in four.

HOW TO READ THIS CHART

ASHA's own wording: at 2 to 3 years speech is becoming clearer but may not be understandable to unfamiliar listeners; by 4 years people can understand most of what a child says; by 4 to 5 years speech is understandable in conversation. Intelligibility is often a better early indicator than any single sound. If an unfamiliar adult cannot follow the child at roughly these levels, that is worth an evaluation regardless of which sounds are involved.

Source: The percentage figures come from the intelligibility research literature (Coplan & Gleason, 1988; Flipsen, 2006), not from ASHA. ASHA describes the same progression in words rather than numbers.