

Parent-Guided Speech Sound Self-Assessment

A simple at-home guide to help parents notice which speech sounds may need support and where to start practising.

Important note

This resource is a guide, not a diagnosis. Children develop at different rates. If your child is very hard to understand, frustrated, losing skills, stuttering often, or you are worried, seek advice from a speech-language therapist, GP, Well Child provider, audiologist, or other appropriate professional.

How to use this guide

- Start with your child's age band.
- Choose 2-4 sounds that are appropriate for their age or that you are concerned about.
- Listen to your child in normal conversation, then try the sample words and sentences.
- Tick what you notice. Do not correct every mistake while testing.
- Choose one starting sound to practise first. Sally Says usually starts children at the beginning of the practice pathway, then moves them up as confidence grows.

Simple result guide

What you notice	What it may mean	Suggested next step
Sound is clear most of the time	Likely on track for that sound.	Keep modelling naturally. Use fun practice only if your child enjoys it.
Sound is sometimes clear	Sound may be emerging but not stable yet.	Start with listening and word-level practice.
Child can say it alone but not in words	They may need help moving the sound into real words.	Start at easy words and short phrases.
Child uses another sound or leaves it out	This sound may need more support, depending on age.	Choose one target sound and begin with listening and simple words.
Child is frustrated, hard to understand, or avoiding talking	Support may be helpful sooner.	Join the waitlist or request therapist guidance.

Step 1: Choose the age band

Age band	What to listen for	Sounds often worth checking	When to seek extra guidance
2-3 years	Early words, simple phrases, whether familiar adults usually understand them.	m, n, p, b, t, d, h, w, k, g, f	If they use very few words, are very hard to understand, or are not combining words.
3-4 years	Short sentences, clearer early sounds, whether unfamiliar adults understand much of what they say.	k, g, f, s, y, l, sh emerging	If most early sounds are missing, speech is very unclear, or they avoid talking.
4-5 years	Longer sentences, story retell, clearer speech in everyday conversation.	s, l, sh, ch, j, v, z, simple blends	If unfamiliar adults often cannot understand them or speech affects confidence.
5-7 years	Late sounds and blends becoming clearer.	r, th, br, tr, fr, gr, sp, st, sk	If sounds are still unclear and affecting school, confidence or friendships.
8+ years	Residual sounds, longer blends, multisyllable words, confidence in conversation.	r, th, str, spl, skr, complex words	If pronunciation errors are still obvious or the child is self-conscious.

Multilingual children

A child learning more than one language may show different patterns across languages. This guide should not be used to judge accent, dialect, or home-language transfer as a disorder. Look at whether your child is understood in the languages they use and whether communication is affecting confidence, learning, or daily life.

Step 2: Quick parent questions

Question	Yes / Sometimes / No	Notes
Can familiar adults understand your child most of the time?		
Can unfamiliar adults understand your child as expected for their age?		
Does your child get frustrated because people do not understand them?		
Does your child avoid certain words or avoid talking?		
Can your child copy a sound or word after you say it?		
Does your child hear the difference when you compare two words?		
Has your child lost words, speech sounds, or communication skills they previously had?		
Have you had concerns about hearing, ear infections, voice, feeding, or swallowing?		

Red flags

If your child has lost communication skills, often seems not to hear, has feeding/swallowing concerns, or is very distressed by communication, seek professional advice rather than relying only on home practice.

Step 3: Speech sound check by age

Use this as a simple home screen. Choose only the sounds that fit your child's age and your main concern. For each sound, ask: Can my child hear it? Say it in words? Use it in a sentence? Use it in everyday talking?

Sound	Age guide	Try words	Try sentence	Common pattern	Parent cue
/b/	2-3+	ball, baby, bus	The ball is big.	pall for ball; dall for ball	Lips together. Voice on. Pop open.
/p/	2-3+	pig, puppy, cup	Poppy packed a puppy toy.	big for pig; leaves final p off cup	Lips together. Quiet pop. No voice.
/m/	2-3+	mum, mouse, home	Mum made more muffins.	bum for mum; leaves m off	Lips together. Voice on. Air through nose.
/t/	2-4+	teddy, table, hat	Tia took two toys.	keddy for teddy; leaves final t off	Tongue tip taps behind top teeth.
/d/	2-4+	dog, daddy, bed	Daddy did a dance.	gog for dog; leaves final d off	Tongue tip taps behind top teeth. Voice on.
/k/	3-4+	key, cookie, back	Katie can carry cookies.	tea for key; tootie for cookie	Back of tongue lifts at the back of the mouth.
/g/	3-4+	go, gate, bag	Gus got a green bag.	do for go; date for gate	Back of tongue lifts. Voice on.
/f/	3-4+	fish, foot, leaf	Fiona found five fish.	pish for fish; bish for fish	Top teeth gently touch lower lip. Air flows.
/s/	4-5+	sun, silly, bus	Sam saw six silly socks.	thun for sun; tun for sun; lisp	Teeth close. Air flows down the middle.
/l/	4-5+	leaf, yellow, ball	Lila likes little lemons.	weaf for leaf; yeyo for yellow	Tongue tip lifts behind top teeth.

Sound	Age guide	Try words	Try sentence	Common pattern	Parent cue
/sh/	4-5+	shoe, fish, washing	She shared shiny shells.	soo for shoe; fish becomes fiss	Lips slightly rounded. Air is quiet and wide.
/ch/	4-5+	chip, teacher, beach	Charlie chose cheesy chips.	tip for chip; ship for chip	Start like t then release into sh.
/j/	4-5+	jam, giant, bridge	Jack jumped over a giant jug.	dam for jam; zam for jam	Start like d then release into zh.
/r/	5-7+	red, rabbit, car	Rory rode a red rocket.	wed for red; wabbit for rabbit	Tongue bunches or lifts; lips may round slightly.
voiceless /th/	5-7+	think, thumb, bath	Theo thinks the bath is thick.	fink or tink for think	Tongue gently between teeth. Quiet air.
voiced /th/	5-7+	this, feather, brother	This feather is thinner than that one.	dis, vis, or fether	Tongue gently between teeth. Voice on.
/br/	6-8+	bread, brush, bridge	Bring the brown broom.	bread becomes red or bed	Lips press for b, then move smoothly into r.
/tr/	6-8+	tree, train, truck	Troy took the train today.	tree becomes free, tee, or chree	Tongue starts with t, then moves into r without a gap.
/sp/	6-8+	spider, spoon, space	I saw a spider spin a web.	spider becomes pider or s-pider with vowel	Hiss for s, then lips pop for p.
/str/	7-8+	street, string, strong	The strong string stretched.	street becomes seet, teet, or stweet	Keep s, t and r moving smoothly together.

Step 4: Rate the sound

Rating	What it means	Start point	Example next resource
0 - Not a concern	The sound is clear in normal talking.	No programme needed for this sound.	Everyday modelling only.
1 - Emerging	The child can hear it or say it sometimes.	Listening or single words.	Easy listening challenge or words.
2 - Inconsistent	The child can say it in words but not always in sentences.	Words or phrases.	Moderate word/phrase worksheet.
3 - Needs support	The sound is usually changed, left out or avoided.	Listening and easy words.	Start at the beginning pathway.
4 - Impacting confidence	The child is frustrated, hard to understand, or avoiding words.	Seek therapist guidance.	Guided/Plus or live therapy recommended.

Sally Says practice pathway

Practice stage	Easy	Moderate	Challenging
1. Listening	Hear the sound in words.	Pick which word has the sound.	Notice the sound in real conversation.
2. Sound alone	Copy the sound with help.	Repeat the sound several times.	Make the sound on request without a model.
3. Words	Say simple target words.	Say longer or mixed-position words.	Use words during a game.
4. Phrases and sentences	Say short phrases.	Say target sentences.	Make up own sentences.
5. Conversation	Use in structured chat.	Use during a game/story.	Use naturally in everyday life.

This creates a simple 15-step pathway: 5 practice stages x 3 difficulty levels. Most children begin at an easier level and move up gradually.

Step 5: Choose one starting target

- Pick one sound to work on first, not five at once.
- Choose a sound that is age-appropriate and comes up often in your child's everyday words.
- Start with listening and easy words unless an SLT recommends a different level.
- Practise for short bursts: 5 minutes, 3-5 times per week is a good starting point.
- Use games, movement, reading and everyday routines so practice does not feel like schoolwork.

Parent script for modelling

If your child says the word incorrectly, try modelling rather than correcting. Example: Child says, "I want the dall."
Parent says, "The ball? Yes, here is the ball." This gives a clear model without making the child feel wrong.

Parent self-assessment worksheet

Complete this page for the sound you are most concerned about. You can repeat it for another sound later.

Question	Parent notes
Child age	
Main concern	
Target sound	
Example words my child finds hard	
What my child says instead	
Can they hear the difference?	Yes / Sometimes / No / Not sure
Can they say the sound by itself?	Yes / Sometimes / No / Not sure
Can they say it in single words?	Yes / Sometimes / No / Not sure
Can they say it in sentences?	Yes / Sometimes / No / Not sure
Can they use it in normal conversation?	Yes / Sometimes / No / Not sure
Does it affect confidence or frustration?	Yes / Sometimes / No / Not sure
Suggested starting point	Listening / Sound / Words / Phrases / Sentences / Conversation

Which Sally Says support may fit?

Situation	Possible fit	Why
Parent wants simple practice and child is not very distressed.	Home Support Lite	Tailored resources and surveys can help families start.
Parent wants feedback but cannot attend live appointments.	Home Support Guided	Audio samples can be reviewed by an SLT.
Parent wants coaching on how they are practising.	Home Support Plus	Video lets the SLT see practice and give clearer feedback.
Child needs direct therapist input or goals are more complex.	Virtual Therapy	Live online support with home resources.
Child needs hands-on support or does not engage online.	In-Person Therapy	Face-to-face support where available.
Parent is unsure what is going on or needs formal next steps.	Initial Assessment	Assessment can clarify the support pathway.

Free website version

This guide can be offered as a free resource on the Sally Says website. A shorter web version could include:

- age selector
- sound selector
- sample words and sentences
- simple parent rating
- suggested next step
- link to free sample worksheets
- call to join the waitlist for tailored resources

Suggested website copy

Not sure which sound to practise? Use our parent-guided speech sound self-assessment to choose an age-appropriate starting point. This guide helps you notice whether your child is hearing, trying, or using a sound in words, sentences and everyday talking. It is not a diagnosis, but it can help you decide whether to start with home practice, join Home Support, or request therapist guidance.