



Articulation Screening Checklist

Which speech sounds should a child have at each age? Check off the sounds your child says clearly. Ages are **90% mastery ages** – when 9 in 10 children have the sound – from McLeod & Crowe (2018) and Crowe & McLeod (2020). The big picture: **most consonants are mastered by age 5, and all by age 7.**

Age band	Sounds expected (check each your child says clearly)	Still OK at this age	Worth a professional look if...
By 3;0	<input type="checkbox"/> /p/ <input type="checkbox"/> /b/ <input type="checkbox"/> /d/ <input type="checkbox"/> /m/ <input type="checkbox"/> /n/ <input type="checkbox"/> /h/ <input type="checkbox"/> /w/	Many sounds still settling; ends of words dropped	Speech largely unintelligible even to family; no clear consonants
By 4;0	<input type="checkbox"/> /t/ <input type="checkbox"/> /k/ <input type="checkbox"/> /g/ <input type="checkbox"/> /ng/ <input type="checkbox"/> /f/ <input type="checkbox"/> /y/	Frontal lisp on /s/; /r/ and “th” still off; blends simplified (“poon” for spoon)	A lateral (slushy) lisp; sounds replaced by /h/ or a throaty catch
By 5;0	<input type="checkbox"/> /s/ <input type="checkbox"/> /l/ <input type="checkbox"/> /sh/ <input type="checkbox"/> /ch/ <input type="checkbox"/> /j/ <input type="checkbox"/> /v/ <input type="checkbox"/> /z/	/r/ and “th” not yet mastered; occasional “wabbit” for rabbit	/s/ or /l/ still in error past 5;0; a stranger understands less than 75%
By 6–7	<input type="checkbox"/> /r/ (by 6;0) <input type="checkbox"/> “th” in <i>this</i> (by 6;0) <input type="checkbox"/> “th” in <i>thumb</i> (by 7;0)	Voiceless “th” is the very last consonant – fine until 7;0	/r/ still distorted near 6;0 with no progress; any lateral lisp

Intelligibility quick check

How much should a *stranger* understand?

Age 2	about 50%
Age 3	about 75%
Age 4	approaching full (75%+ typical)

Flag: over age 4 and strangers follow less than about two-thirds → worth an evaluation.

Check in now – at any age

- Drops the **first** sound of words (“at” for cat)
- Back sounds replace front ones (“key” for tea)
- Sounds replaced by /h/ or a throaty catch
- **Loses** speech skills they used to have
- Frustrated, avoids talking, or teased about speech

Usually fine to monitor

- “Wabbit” for rabbit before age 6
- Missing “th” before age 7
- A mild frontal lisp at age 4
- Later-but-typical edge of any range

One-minute intelligibility screen: have your child describe a picture or their day for about a minute. Count the words *you’d* have understood without context – 14 of 20 words ≈ 70% intelligible. On track for a 3-year-old; for a 5-year-old, pair it with the checklist above and consider a professional read. Evaluations are free in the U.S. through Early Intervention (under 3) or your school district (3+).

Informational, not diagnostic. This checklist supports a conversation with a qualified speech-language pathologist – it does not diagnose. Ages apply to children whose main language is mainstream American English; bilingual children and speakers of other dialects follow different, equally typical timelines. Sources: McLeod & Crowe (2018); Crowe & McLeod (2020), *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*. Full guide with examples: soundsafari.app/blog/articulation-screening-checklist • © 2026 Sound Safari