



Articulation disorders in children

What is an articulation disorder?

An articulation disorder is a problem producing speech sounds correctly. This may be due to imprecise placement, timing, pressure, speed or flow of movement of the lips, tongue or throat. Errors may be characterized by:

- omissions (cool for school)
- distortions (irregular production of a sound),
- substitutions (wock for rock)
- additions (puhlease for please).

A speech clinician can assess and determine if your child's errors are considered age appropriate or if they should be treated by direct therapy intervention.

What causes articulation problems?

Articulation problems may be the result of:

- a structural issue, such as a cleft palate
- brain damage or neurological dysfunction, as in a child with Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome or autism
- a child's inability to coordinate the muscle movements necessary to produce speech
- faulty speech models during the crucial years for speech and language development, as seen in children with a history of chronic ear infections or hearing problems

In many cases, there is not a clearly identifiable reason for the problem.

How do I know if my child has an articulation disorder?

A child's ability to produce sounds occurs gradually with development. Although we do expect certain sounds to be produced by a certain age, every child develops speech at his or her own rate. A general rule of thumb is that children should be understood by unfamiliar listeners 75% of the time by age three and 90% of the time by age four.

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Following is the typical range for articulation development.

- age 2 range: b,d,h,m,n,p
- age 3 range: f,g,k,t,w
- age 4 range: q
- age 5 range: ch, j,l,s,sh,j,bl
- age 6 range: r,v,br,dr,fl,fr,gl,gr,kl,kr,pl,st,tr
- age 7 range: z,sl,sp,sw, th (as in thin) and th (as in that)

What do I do if my child has an articulation problem?

If you suspect your child has an articulation problem, contact your pediatrician and share your concerns. The pediatrician will refer you to a speech-language pathologist to evaluate your child's speech.

It is important to assess your child's hearing to determine whether a hearing loss is affecting your child's ability to perceive sound. If your child has not had a recent hearing test, a hearing evaluation should be done prior to seeing the speech-language pathologist.

How Courage Kenny Kids can help

In speech therapy, our clinicians will use specialized techniques, structured play activities and games to address your child's individual needs. We will practice sounds, words, phrases, sentences and connected speech through these play tasks. We'll also do oral motor play and auditory discrimination games.

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