

Speech Sound Disorders

How Children Learn to Speak Clearly

Babies begin to make sounds shortly after birth. As children continue to develop, they will learn to produce sounds in a fairly predictable order, typically learning to say easier sounds first, followed by the development of more difficult sounds over time. By age 8, most children have learned how to master all speech sounds in words, while some may have acquired them earlier.

For more information on when other communication milestones are acquired, click here:

Does my child have a speech delay?

While it is normal to make speech errors as children are learning language, children with speech sound disorders, will continue to have trouble saying certain sounds in words past the expected age of acquisition (i.e. when other children their age are able to produce these sounds clearly). This can make it harder for others to understand what they are trying to say.

Speech Sound Disorders include the following:

1. Articulation disorders – difficulties with making certain sounds such as “sh”
2. Phonological disorders – sound substitutions are rule based and a means of simplification (e.g. always using /p/ for /f/ - pun/fun, pour/four)
3. Motor speech disorders – speech errors are due to difficulties with the brain coordinating movements with the lips, tongue or jaw to produce sounds within words

Please refer to the Articulation Developmental Norms resource to see if your child is developing speech sounds as expected for their age and stage of development.

When to seek the help of a professional

- If your child continues to have difficulties with sounds beyond the time that they should have acquired them
 - If you or others have difficulty understanding what your child is trying to say
 - If your child is becoming frustrated when speaking to you or others
 - If your child is using gestures or grunts in the place of words
 - If you feel your child’s desire to interact with others is being impacted by their ability to be understood
- If your child is using few words or words that are produced require a great deal of effort

What is the role of a Speech-Language Pathologist?

A qualified speech-language pathologist (SLP) will be able to assess your child's speech and determine if there are concerns about the way they are producing their sounds. In addition to listening to how your child sounds, the SLP may also look at how your child moves his lips, jaw and tongue. An SLP will also take into consideration a history of ear infections and request that a hearing evaluation be completed as hearing loss, even if intermittent, can impact speech and language development.