

Speech Sound Disorders

What is a Speech Sound Disorder?

All children make mistakes as they learn sounds. Each sound in the English language develops at a different age. A speech sound disorder refers to a child's misuse of a sound that should have been developed by their age. Speech sound disorders are broken into categories:

- **Articulation Disorder**
 - Refers to a child's difficulty producing certain sounds accurately, and is related to motor capabilities at the single sound level.
 - Example: a child might have a frontal lisp (substituting the "th" sound for the "s" sound).
- **Phonology Disorder**
 - Refers to a child's simplification of an entire sound system beyond an age at which it is appropriate. Phonology is not considered to be motor-based and typically is affected by a child's ability to differentiate between and produce different patterns of sounds. It usually affects multiple speech sounds.
 - Example: many young children replace "k" and "g" with "t" and "d", respectively (as in "tup" for "cup" or "doe" for "go"). This is referred to as "fronting".

How Do We Evaluate Speech Sound Disorders?

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) use formal and informal tests to evaluate speech sound disorders. Most commonly, they will use a standardized test in which the child names pictures to record the child's speech sound errors. The SLP will also listen to the child in conversation to see how his or her errors affect intelligibility (how easily they are understood by others). Finally, the SLP also completes an oral mechanism examination to determine whether the child has any barriers to speech in his or her motor movements and anatomy.

How Do We Treat Speech Sound Disorders?

The treatment approach of a speech sound disorder depends on whether it is an articulation or a phonology disorder, what kinds of sounds are affected, and how easily the child can say the sound with instruction from the SLP. Generally, treatment includes the following:

- Learning to recognize the difference between the target sound and the sound that is being substituted (correct vs. incorrect sound production).

- Teaching placement techniques (e.g., teaching the child that the “k” sound is made in the back of the mouth, like a cough).
- Modeling the correct production of a sound with visual cues.
- Practicing the sound in different words, phrases, and sentences.
- For phonology disorders, learning the rules of speech and understanding which sounds are similar to each other.

References

“Speech Sound Disorders: Articulation and Phonological Processes” by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association:

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/SpeechSoundDisorders/>

“What are Phonological Disorders?” by Super Duper Publications:

<http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/356%20Phonological%20Disorders.pdf>