

ARTICULATION PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

WHAT IS AN ARTICULATION PROBLEM?

A child has an articulation problem when he/she produces sounds and words incorrectly. This can make it difficult for people to understand what is being said. While learning to talk, it is normal for all children to make mistakes and pronounce some things incorrectly. This can sometimes make it hard to understand what it is they are trying to say. As a parent, it is sometimes difficult to know whether or not it is a true problem. Is it just “baby talk” or immature speech, or is it something to be concerned about?

Once a child has mastered a basic vocabulary and started putting 2, 3 and then 4 words together, they typically start to improve, in terms of their ability, to pronounce things more clearly. There is a developmental order in which children acquire sounds, but by 4, a child should be understood 100% of the time by unfamiliar people.

Children with articulation or speech sound production problems may do one or more of the following: drop sounds or syllables, substitute one sound for another, or distort one or more sounds. If these errors are left, the difficulties may persist and begin to frustrate the child.

WHAT CAUSES AN ARTICULATION PROBLEM?

An articulation problem may result from a physical problem such as a cleft palate or hearing loss. Children who experience frequent ear infections may also be at greater risk of speech problems. However, in many cases, no physical factors are found and the errors are due to an unknown disturbance in the normal process of learning to talk.

DO CHILDREN LEARN SOUNDS IN A PARTICULAR SEQUENCE?

Yes, sounds are learned in a predictable order. The chart below tells you which sounds develop when.

By 1 Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A child will imitate different sounds, e.g. Baba, dada.
By 2 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A child will use different sounds at the beginning of a word ✓ 26-50% of the child's speech should be understood
By 3 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A child should use sounds such as p, b, m, n, w, t, d, k, g and f ✓ Parents and familiar listeners should understand the child's speech most of the time ✓ Unfamiliar people should understand 70-80% of what the child says
By 4 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A child's speech should be 100% understood although speech sound errors may persist
By 5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Later developing sounds such as: l, s, r, v, z, ch, sh and th should be developing ✓ More than 50% of children have acquired these late sounds by 5 years old and 75% of children have acquired them by 6 years of age

No – to any of the age appropriate questions on this chart indicates the need to refer to a Speech-Language Pathologist to have the child assessed.