



## Fact Sheet - Speech disorders

# Articulation disorder

Articulation refers to the way we make speech sounds. To make sounds we coordinate movements of the lips, tongue, teeth, palate, and lungs. This takes many different nerves and muscles working together.

Children with an articulation disorder have problems making certain sounds or forming speech sounds properly. This can affect the quality of the sounds they make, the way they talk, or their ability to be understood.

## What are the signs of an articulation disorder?

Common examples of speech errors<sup>#</sup> seen in articulation disorders are:

- Lisps, including:
  - Interdental lisp: where the 's' sound is produced like a 'th' sound
  - Lateral lisp: where air escapes from the sides of the tongue creating a 'slushy' sound
- Difficulty producing the 'r' sound, so 'rabbit' may sound like 'wabbit'<sup>\*</sup>
- Difficulty producing the 'th' sound, so 'three' may sound like 'free'<sup>^\*</sup>
- Children with cleft lip/palate may use speech errors that compensate for the change in oral structure e.g., air may escape from their nose instead of their mouth



## What causes articulation disorder?

There are two main types of articulation disorder:

- **Structural disorder:** where a child's oral or facial structures make it difficult for them to make sound(s) correctly (e.g., cleft lip/palate, overbite/underbite, tongue overgrowth condition)
- **Functional disorder:** where a child is unable to make sound(s) correctly but there is no clear cause (e.g., no hearing impairment, no oral/facial structural issues). Instead, a child may have mis-learned a pattern for making a speech sound (e.g., lisp)

Regardless of the cause, your child's speech therapist will be able to assist with the recommended treatment.

<sup>#</sup>Examples listed relate to sounds of the English language. Errors of articulation may vary depending on the sounds of the language spoken.

<sup>\*</sup> 'w' for 'r' and 'f' for 'th' can sometimes be phonological processes used by children rather than articulation errors. A speech therapist will test to see if the child can produce the sound of interest and whether they understand the speech sound patterns (phonology) of their language.

<sup>^</sup> This pattern is acceptable in some regional dialects in some regions in the UK



## How is articulation disorder diagnosed?

Qualified speech pathologists (also known as speech-language pathologists or speech therapists) assess children's speech difficulties to determine whether they are a result of an articulation disorder, another type of speech disorder (e.g., phonological disorder), or a combination of speech sound disorders.

Assessments usually involve observing the child's oral structures at rest and during movement, and examining speech by naming pictures which are designed to elicit all of the sounds of the child's language.

## How is articulation disorder treated?

A qualified speech pathologist can identify the cause, and plan treatment with your child and family. Treatment may include regular appointments and exercises for you to do with your child at home.

With appropriate speech therapy, many children with articulation disorders will have improvement in their speech.

## References

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