

# Gloss **A**ry

## Articulation

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Articulation is the process of moving and co-ordinating the tongue, lips, jaw, vocal folds and soft palate, to produce the speech sounds needed in order to speak our language(s). The moving parts in the mouth, or articulators, have to move with speed and accuracy to execute the sequence of sounds that make up a word, and achieve clear speech.

### Articulation difficulties

Speech development is typically gradual, with predictable milestones but children do vary in their development and difficulties with speech sounds are common in pre-school children.

Difficulties with articulating speech sounds come under the umbrella of developmental speech difficulties and affects a child's ability to produce a specific speech sound or sounds in combination. These speech errors are phonetic in nature in that the child is attempting to produce the correct sound/s but is unable to articulate it/them.

There are different types of developmental speech difficulties, and articulation difficulties can occur in isolation or co-occur with other developmental speech difficulties.

### Causes

The reason for articulation difficulties may be known and associated with specific conditions (eg: a neurological diagnosis such as cerebral palsy, or structural/anatomical problems such as cleft lip/palate) or unknown (with no serious problems with nerve-muscle function). If the cause is unknown, articulation difficulties typically affect a small selection of sounds and speech is relatively easy to understand.

### Assessment

A qualified speech and language therapist should assess difficulties with articulation. The therapist would assess the presence and extent of any developmental speech difficulties and identify particular patterns. Onward referral to other professionals would also be considered as appropriate eg: Ear Nose Throat (ENT) services.

Following assessment, a decision would need to be made regarding whether or not intervention is needed. This would depend on the nature of the child's speech errors, their age and how understandable and acceptable the child's speech is to others.

The variations and 'errors', which some children make in their speech, might be more accurately described as a speech difference rather than a speech difficulty. Intelligibility levels or the 'understandability of speech' are difficult to measure but are an important consideration when speech and language therapists are considering whether intervention is needed.

### Impact

Mild articulation errors that do not affect the intelligibility of speech are not typically associated with negative social, academic or vocational outcomes. However, there is some research evidence to suggest that children who display these errors might be more negatively perceived by their peers.

### Intervention

Where intervention for articulation difficulties is needed, it is likely to involve parents and include developing a child's awareness and listening as well as production of the targeted sound(s).

## References

**Bowen C and Snow P** (2017) *Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. Croyden: J & R Press Ltd

**Law J, Parkinson A and Tamhne R** (2000) (Eds.), *Communication Difficulties in Childhood*. Oxon: Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd

**McLachlan H and Elks L** (2012) *Language Builders: Advice and activities to encourage children's communication skills*. Cornwall: Elklan

**Pascoe M, Stackhouse J and Wells B** (2006) *Persisting Speech Difficulties in Children*. Chichester: Wiley

**Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**  
Developmental Speech Difficulties.

[https://www.rcslt.org/clinical\\_resources/developmental\\_speech/](https://www.rcslt.org/clinical_resources/developmental_speech/)

**Sugden E, Baker E, Munro N and Lynn Williams A** (2016) Involvement of parents in intervention for childhood speech sound disorders: a review of the evidence. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 51 (6), 597–625

**Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. These publications should be available at academic libraries.**

## Online resources

Bristol Speech & Language Therapy Research Unit  
<http://www.speech-therapy.org.uk>

## Organisations that can help

**Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**  
RCSLT  
2 White Hart Yard  
London SE1 1NX  
Tel: 020 7378 1200  
<https://www.rcslt.org/>

The professional body for speech and language therapists

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