

Common Speech Disorders in Children



Highlights

Speech and language skills are important for the development of your child's literacy and numeracy skills.

Stuttering is a speech disorder that stops the natural rhythm or flow of speech.

An articulation disorder is when a child has problems saying a particular sound or being understood when they speak.

If you have any concerns about your child's speech, see your doctor, paediatrician or a speech pathologist.

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What You Need to Know

Early detection and treatment of speech and literacy issues is important.

There are speech milestones that children should reach at certain ages, which serve as a guide to normal speech development.

These milestones must be reached in a sequence before more complex skills can be learned.

Speech and language skills are essential for communication, playing with friends, and learning.

These skills are also crucial for learning to read and write (literacy).

Communication skills are connected to social skills and forming friendships.

These broad rules of thumb apply to most children:

This may be a bit different for children who are :

from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
learning English

If you have any concerns about your child's speech development it's best to talk with your doctor or a speech pathologist.

Understanding the Causes

Speech and literacy problems are common in children. While many children experience speech disorders, the causes may include:

Developmental delays

Learning disabilities

Intellectual disabilities

Cerebral palsy

Hearing loss

Physical problems (e.g., cleft palate) that make it difficult to create speech sounds

Common Speech Challenges

Children can develop various speech problems, such as:

- Stuttering
- Articulation disorder
- Phonological disorder

Stuttering

Stuttering is a speech disorder that affects the natural rhythm or flow of speech. It can involve:

- Breaks in speech
- Stretching sounds and words
- Repetition of sounds, syllables, words, or phrases

While the cause of stuttering is unknown, it typically begins around 3 to 4 years of age. Stuttering may develop gradually or suddenly. It's common, affecting about 1 in 100 people.

Stuttering can cause communication difficulties and may lead to anxiety, even with mild stuttering. It can be unpredictable, varying in severity and frequency. Early intervention is recommended for young children, and stuttering can often be successfully managed in older children.

Articulation Disorder

A child with an articulation disorder has trouble forming specific speech sounds. This involves the coordination of the:

- Lips
- Tongue
- Teeth
- Palate \ (top of the mouth)\
- Lungs

Children with an articulation disorder may:

Have difficulty producing certain speech sounds correctly (e.g., lisping, where 's' sounds like 'th')

Substitute sounds (e.g., saying 'wabbit' instead of 'rabbit')

Phonological Disorder

Phonological disorders occur when a child makes mistakes in how sounds are combined to form words. Children with phonological disorders may:

Use sounds correctly but place them in the wrong words or positions (e.g., using the 'd' sound instead of the 'g' sound, saying 'doe' instead of 'go')

Make errors in specific words (e.g., leaving out sounds in words, such as 'lie' instead of 'like')

Phonological disorders are linked to ongoing issues with language and literacy. Treatment is important for children with phonological disorders.

Functional Speech Sounds Disorders

The term "speech sound disorder" is used to describe both articulation and phonological disorders, which can be difficult to distinguish.

When to Seek Professional Help

If you are concerned about your child's speech, consult a doctor or pediatrician who can arrange an assessment with a speech pathologist. Speech pathologists specialize in helping children with communication difficulties.

Assessing Speech Development

A speech pathologist will assess the child's needs and determine the most appropriate treatments and services. A referral is not necessary to see a speech pathologist, but it may be helpful for accessing funding to support the cost of services.

Managing Speech Disorders

Management of speech problems depends on the specific difficulties the child is facing. Speech pathologists can assist with:

Talking

Understanding others

Reading

Spelling

Using technology to communicate

Tools and Assistance

Speech Pathologists Speech pathologists are trained professionals who specialize in diagnosing and treating speech disorders. They play a crucial role in helping children with stuttering, articulation issues, and other speech-related concerns. They offer tailored therapy plans and strategies to improve speech and communication skills.

Speech Therapy Techniques There are various therapeutic techniques that can help children with speech disorders, including exercises to improve articulation, fluency techniques for stuttering, and activities to enhance language comprehension. These exercises are personalized based on the child's specific needs and progress.

Speech Development Resources Many resources, such as books, videos, and interactive apps, can support speech development. These resources focus on building vocabulary, improving pronunciation, and encouraging communication in a fun and engaging way.

Parent Training Parents can benefit from learning strategies to assist their child's speech development at home. This might include practicing speech exercises, using simple and clear language, or encouraging conversation in everyday settings. Speech pathologists can guide parents in reinforcing therapy at home.

Educational Support Schools and educational programs can also provide valuable assistance. Teachers and special education professionals can support children with speech difficulties by using alternative communication strategies, providing extra time during activities, or offering individual speech sessions.

Community Support Groups Support groups for children with speech disorders can be an excellent resource. Connecting with other families facing similar challenges can provide emotional support, share experiences, and offer practical advice for managing speech development at home and in social settings.