

Disfluency & Articulation

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Many preschool-aged children have difficulties producing some of the speech sounds. Most children outgrow these speech sound errors. Some children need a speech-language pathologist to teach them how to make certain sounds.

Articulation therapy with preschool-aged children is very effective at correcting speech sound errors. Children are trained to hear the difference between correct sounds and incorrect sounds. Once they can tell the difference between the sounds, they are ready to make the difference in their own speech. Eventually, the child will be making only the correct sounds, and the error sounds will be long forgotten.

Other preschool-aged children go through periods of speech which resemble stuttering. They may repeat sounds or words, or use pauses or hesitations between their words or phrases. This "disfluent" period is usually a normal stage of speech and language development which many children experience. Most children outgrow this stage without the help of a speech-language pathologist. If a child is showing signs of struggle during the disfluencies, then a parent should contact a speech-language pathologist.

There are occasions when a child may have difficulties with producing speech sounds correctly while experiencing disfluencies in his/her speech. These children present a dilemma for the speech-language pathologist. Typically, a child with speech sound difficulties would receive articulation therapy which would increase a child's awareness about how s/he is making sounds and how to make them more correctly. This method would place more pressure on the child with disfluencies, likely making his/her speech more disfluent. The speech-language pathologist might do articulation therapy more indirectly, placing less pressure on the child's speech. Progress in articulation therapy goals may be slower, however, the speech-language pathologist must balance the child's articulation goals with his/her disfluent speech concerns. When a child's speech becomes more fluent, the therapist could work more on the articulation. But if the child's speech becomes more disfluent, the therapist must ease up on the articulation therapy.

Occasionally, a child's articulation is so unclear that it interferes with the child's communication more than the child's disfluencies. In cases such as this, the speech-language pathologist might place more priority on improving the clarity of the child's speech by focusing on articulation therapy, despite the risk of increasing the child's disfluencies.

If you have any concerns about articulation errors and disfluent speech, please contact a speech-language pathologist.

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