



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 016 | Speech and language disorders

Articulation disorder

What it means

An articulation disorder involves difficulty forming particular speech sounds, often producing distortions or substitutions. It is one type of speech sound disorder. Whether a sound is expected depends on age, language, and dialect; an error should not be diagnosed simply because it differs from one adult's pronunciation. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Many articulation difficulties have no single identified cause. Hearing loss, oral structural differences, or other speech and developmental conditions may contribute. Producing a speech sound requires coordinated movement, but an articulation error does not automatically indicate weak mouth muscles or childhood apraxia of speech. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

A child may have persistent difficulty with one or more sounds, even though other speech sounds and sentence patterns are developing. Errors may occur differently depending on a sound's position in a word. Speech may be understandable overall or cause substantial communication difficulty. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

A speech-language pathologist reviews sound production in different word positions and conversation, checks whether cues help, and examines relevant oral structures and hearing information. Language background and developmental expectations are essential. The assessment determines whether difficulties are mainly articulation, phonological patterns, or motor speech needs. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Therapy may teach a useful sound placement or movement, practice the sound in increasingly meaningful speech, and support carryover into conversation. Visual, auditory, or tactile cues are selected individually. The clinician adjusts targets to developmental readiness and functional need. Generic blowing or tongue exercises should not replace appropriate speech practice. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Follow the clinician's demonstrated cues and use brief, successful practice. Model the sound naturally during play rather than correcting every sentence. Praise effort and communication. If practice causes frustration, reduce the demand and discuss the plan with the therapist.

When to seek help

New articulation changes with weakness, drooling, swallowing trouble, or loss of skills require medical review.

Questions for your care team

- Is this sound expected for the child's age and language?
- Which cue helps the child make the sound accurately?
- How will practice move from single words into useful conversation?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss articulation disorder. An articulation disorder involves difficulty forming particular speech sounds, often producing distortions or substitutions. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: A language or accent difference should not be treated as a speech disorder.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Distortion: a sound produced in an unusual way.
- Stimulability: ability to produce a sound with help.
- Carryover: using a skill outside practice.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Speech Sound Disorders: Articulation and Phonology

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/articulation-and-phonology/>

[2] Speech and Language Developmental Milestones

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/speech-and-language>

[3] Spoken Language Disorders

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/spoken-language-disorders/>