

Developmental Speech Disorders

Speech is how we pronounce sounds and words. It includes: articulation (how we make speech sounds using mouth, lips, and tongue), voice (how we use our vocal cords and breath) and fluency (rhythm of speech). Children may substitute, add, omit, or change sounds but not every speech error is a problem. For example, some errors may be considered typical at that particular stage of a child's development.

In most cases, the cause of developmental speech disorders is unknown. However, known causes include sensory deficiencies (e.g. hearing loss), developmental disabilities (e.g. Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder) and structural abnormalities (e.g. cleft palate).

Speech disorders can have negative social effects (e.g. bullying, reduced self-esteem) especially among younger children. Children with these disorders may also be at risk of reading difficulties due to their poor auditory, phonological and verbal memory skills.

With the proper intervention, many children are able to achieve accurate pronunciations of sounds in everyday communication. However, effectiveness of therapy is also dependent on practice outside of the therapy sessions.

How is it treated?

Speech therapists can help your child pronounce sounds accurately. Treatment may include learning the correct way to produce sounds, distinguishing between accurate and inaccurate pronunciations and practicing sounds in different words, sentences and subsequently in conversations.

What does rehabilitation involve?

The overall aim of rehabilitation is to achieve accurate pronunciation of speech sounds when communicating with others.

Depending on the type of speech disorder, the treatment approach will differ. For children with speech-sound disorders, the speech therapist may work on increasing the child's phonological awareness. For children with childhood speech apraxia of speech, the speech therapist may work on executing the right articulatory movements at the right time at different levels (e.g. single words, sentences). For children with dysarthria, the speech therapist may introduce strategies to increase precision of articulation.

An oromotor assessment, used to assess one's movement and strength of lips, jaw and tongue, will be conducted, along with formal and informal speech assessments. The therapist may then use therapy trials to identify the most effective approach for the child to produce sounds accurately.

Useful websites

[Speech Sound Disorders](#)

[Children's Speech Sound Disorders](#)