

What is speech sound disorder?



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Have you ever noticed any articulation errors from your child? For example, “媽媽我想養『豆』(狗)仔” “我哋一齊玩『包』(拋)波呀” If you have spotted similar misarticulation from your child, he/she may have speech sound disorder.

Speech sound disorder refers to distortion of speech sound due to oral structural abnormalities, motor disorders, related to linguistic aspect of sound production etc. (ASHA, n.d.) In this article, we will focus on functional speech sound disorder. If a child fails to produce /f-/ in “呼” at the age of 3y6m, he/she would be most likely to have speech sound disorder (To & Cheung, 2013). A few examples of articulation errors are fronting (e.g. 狗-->豆), stopping (e.g. 星-->丁) , /h-/ deletion (e.g. 口-->嘔) and deaspiration (e.g. 拋-->包).

Through comprehensive speech assessment, speech therapists analyze the underlying cause and unusual error pattern of children’s misarticulation to decide their training needs. The order of phoneme acquisition, impact on general speech intelligibility and stimulability of phoneme are some of the crucial factors in deciding the target phoneme. Moreover, various cues like verbal cues, visual cues and tactile cues are commonly adopted by therapists in articulation training.



How can parents and teachers help children with articulation problem?

1. Talking to children face to face helps them to focus on adults' mouth shapes. Exaggerated mouth shapes facilitate better demonstration of the placement and movement of articulators (jaw, lip and tongue). Repeating children's speech sound errors should be avoided and clear demonstration of the target speech sound could be done instead for better learning.
2. Following speech therapists' instructions and adopting effective cueing methods in home practice. For example, the use of tactile cue (pressing down child's lower lip to induce frontal teeth touching lower lip) in eliciting /f-/ sound.
3. Speech sound perception training is essential in developing children's awareness and discrimination of the target sound
4. Positive feedback should be given when the target sound is produced correctly.

If your child has poorer speech intelligibility than peers of the same age, please consult speech therapists for comprehensive speech assessment.

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