

Insights

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ARTICULATION PROBLEMS



Q. Will a child outgrow a functional articulation problem?

A. A child's overall speech pattern will usually become more understandable as he or she matures, but some children will need direct training to eliminate all articulation errors. The exact speech pattern of the individual child will determine the answer to this question.

Q. Do children learn all sounds at once?

A. Sounds are learned in an orderly sequence. Some sounds, such as *p*, *m*, and *b*, are learned as early as 3 years of age. Other sounds, such as *s*, *r*, and *l*, often are not completely mastered until the early school years.

Q. At what age should a child be producing all sounds correctly?

A. Children should make all the sounds of English by 8 years of age. Many children learn these sounds much earlier.

Q. How can I help a child pronounce words correctly?

A. By setting a good example. Don't interrupt or constantly correct the child. Don't let anyone tease or mock (including friends or relatives). Instead, present a good model. Use the misarticulated word correctly with emphasis. If the child says, "That's a big wabbit," you say, "Yes, that is a big rabbit. A big white rabbit. Would you like to have a rabbit?"

Q. Can an adult with an articulation problem be helped?

A. Most articulation problems can be helped regardless of a person's age, but the longer the problem persists, the harder it is to change. Some problems, such as those relating to nerve impulses to the muscles of articulation (dysarthria), are particularly difficult and generally require a longer period of help than a functional disorder. Other conditions that may influence progress in a child or an adult include hearing ability, condition of the oral structures such as the teeth, frequency of help obtained, motivation, intelligence, and cooperation.

Q. Who can help?

A. Contact a speech-language pathologist if you are concerned about speech. A speech-language pathologist is a professional trained at the master's or doctoral level to evaluate and help the child or adult with an articulation problem as well as other speech and/or language disorders. The speech-language pathologist can advise whether professional help is indicated and how to arrange for assistance. The speech-language pathologist can also give you guidance or provide services to help prevent or eliminate a problem. Early help is especially important for more severe problems.

Q. Is it important to correct an articulation problem?

A. When you consider the possible impact an articulation problem may have on one's social, emotional, educational, and/or vocational status, the answer becomes obvious. Our speech is an important part of us. The quality of our lives is affected by the adequacy of our speech.