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Developmental Phonological Disorders

for children with articulation problems
Information Sheet No. 3

Third in a series of information sheets on children's communication difficulties aimed at health & education professionals and parents.

“Mum ... tan i doe to tinder?”

Sounds familiar? Sounds cute? Can you understand it? Is your child frustrated if you don't understand it? Is it “normal” for their age? Learning to speak is a most complex process which generally develops naturally. For some, it needs some help to unravel the “rules of language”.

Developmental Phonological Disorders are a group of language disorders describing a disruption of sound patterns in children whose speech is not easily understood by 4 years of age (Bowen,1998). There is no known cause. Their grammar may be slower but usually their development otherwise is normal. Children with Phonological Disorders need specific targeted therapy to teach them how to organise, produce and effectively use their “jumbled” speech patterns.

But When Should A Child See A Speech Pathologist?

3, 4, 5 years of age? Unfortunately there is no simple answer. Different sounds develop at different rates but as a guide see below:

- Usually parents can understand **25%** of a child's speech by **18 months** of age.
- Usually parents can understand **50-75%** of a child's speech by **24 months** of age.
- Usually parents can understand **75-100%** of a child's speech by **36 months** of age.

(Bowen, 1998)

And if your 4 year old is difficult to understand, then there is likely to be a problem.

The sound errors children make are not really “errors”, rather they are generally predictable non-adult speech patterns (phonological *processes* or *deviations*) usually with consonants. But when are these processes normal? Some of the more common processes are below.

Final Consonant Deletion

[ie omitting sounds at the ends of words]

- eg. “bu” instead of “bus”
- “cu” instead of “cup”
- “bie” instead of “bike”

This *process* should be gone by **3 years3 months**

Fronting

[ie substituting sounds made with the back of the tongue with those made with the front (tip) of the tongue]

- eg. “tar” instead of “car”
- “date” instead of “gate”
- “sop” instead of “shop”

This *process* should be gone by **3 yrs 6 months**

Cluster Reduction

[ie omitting one consonant (usually) when 2 consonants are together]

- eg. “pill” instead of “spill”
- “moke” instead of “smoke”

This *process* should be gone by **4 yrs 0 months**

(Grunwell, 1981)

There are individual differences, so this is a guide only. Early assessment is recommended, especially if your child is hard to understand and getting frustrated because of their speech and communication difficulties. Therapy is usually lots of fun and most children make good progress, especially if there is active parent/caregiver participation. Up to date therapy techniques and comprehensive materials are utilised.

If you have any concerns about your child and the possibility of a phonological disorder, seek an assessment and therapy early.

NB: The information contained herein is not advice. It is general information for adults on children's communication development. It is not intended to be used as a sole means of identifying children with communication difficulties. Advice from a qualified paediatric Speech Pathologist is recommended. This information is copyright, Vincent Borg, 2009