

Articulation (Pronunciation and Talking)

What is articulation (pronunciation and talking)?



Articulation (pronunciation and talking) is the ability to physically move the tongue, lips, teeth and jaw to produce sequences of speech sounds, which make up words and sentences.

Why is articulation (pronunciation and talking) important?

Articulation is important to be able to produce sounds, words and sentences

which are clear and can be easily understood and interpreted by others in order to be able to express basic needs and wants, right through to being able to engage in complex conversations.

Depending on the extent of the difficulties, unclear speech can impact significantly on how well a child can interact with adults and their peers and can affect the development of language and social skills. A child who is having difficulties being understood can become frustrated and angry which may lead to behavioural issues. Articulation is also important in literacy skills such as reading and spelling out of words.

What are the building blocks necessary to develop articulation (pronunciation and talking)?

- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, listening and doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done (e.g. being able to attend to speech and sounds long enough to be able to process the information).
- **Hearing:** For detection of speech sounds.
- **Good middle ear functioning** most of the time (e.g. a child with ongoing ear infections, 'glue ear' or colds which block the ears may have fluctuating hearing levels which can affect speech).
- **Process speech sounds**, identify and hear differences between sounds.
- **Muscle coordination:** The ability to move and coordinate the muscles involved in producing sounds (e.g. diaphragm, lips, tongue, vocal cords, jaw and palate).
- **Understanding** that sounds convey meaning.

How can you tell if my child has problem with articulation (pronunciation and talking)?

If a child has difficulties with articulation they might:

- Become overly frustrated when communicating with others.
- Produce speech that is difficult to understand even for familiar listeners.

- Have difficulty linking together more than one or two sounds.
- Tend to use only vowel sounds (very open mouthed noises).
- Produce speech that is unclear alongside dribbling and messy eating skills.
- Produces speech that is less clear than other children of the same age.
- Produce an interdental lisp (e.g. tongue protruding between the teeth when saying a /s/ or /z/ sound) if over the ages of 3.5 - 4 years.
- Be school aged and still having difficulty saying several sounds.

What other problems can occur when a child has articulation (pronunciation and talking) difficulties?

When a child has articulation difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Social skills:** Unclear articulation can impact the ability to engage in reciprocal interaction with others (either verbally or non-verbally), to compromise with others, and be able to recognize and follow social norms.
- **Expressive (using) language:** Using language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas. The child may reduce the length of their sentences or use familiar words to help with being understood.
- **Self confidence:** A child's belief in their ability to perform a task.
- **Fluency:** The smoothness or flow with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are produced when talking.
- **Independence:** The child may be "clingy" or always want a parent/carer to be around to translate or help with their communication.
- **Behaviour:** A child may become overly frustrated due to not being understood.
- **Reading and spelling** which rely on sounding out the words.

What can be done to improve articulation (pronunciation and talking)?

- **Play:** For the young child, engage in play where you model and use lots of

different sounds while playing (e.g. saying “ch ch ch” as the train passes by, “baa” goes the sheep).

- **Talk** to your child often throughout the day to model correct pronunciation of words.
- **Reduce background noise:** Turn off background noise in the home (e.g. television, radio, music) when engaging with your child to minimise distractions.
- **Look** at the child when they are speaking and encourage them to look at you so that they can imitate how to say words or sounds correctly.
- **Read** to the child.
- **Listen and respond** to the child’s message (not the exact pronunciation of the words).
- **Repeat** the child’s sentences if their speech is not clear (e.g. child: “Dat my deen tar.” adult: “Yes, that’s your green car.”). By repeating what your child has said you are producing a good language model and you are also showing that you have listened to what the child has said.
- **Show:** Ask the child to show you what they are talking about if you don’t understand what they have said. Ask for ONE repetition and try to have a guess. Don’t be afraid of saying you can’t understand what the child has said.

What activities can help improve articulation (pronunciation and talking)?

- **Naming** items together when completing tasks such as looking at a book, in the car, looking outside, while playing and during shopping.
- **Copying** facial expressions in the mirror (e.g. smiling, kissing, licking lips).
- **Playing** something together that the child really enjoys and throughout the game model words with which they are having difficulty.
- **Modeling** and using different sounds during interactions and in play (e.g. “s” is the snake sound, “sh” the baby is sleeping).
- **Listening to** and identifying sounds in words (e.g. “shoe” starts with the “sh” sound).
- **Correcting:** If a child says a word incorrectly, model the correct production back to them but there is no need to make them say it again

(e.g. child: “Look at the tat”. adult: “Yes, it’s a cat” and then continue with the conversation). This helps to provide a subtle, positive correction by modelling the correct response rather than highlighting that the child has said it incorrectly.

Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with articulation (pronunciation and talking)?

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with articulation difficulties is important to:

- Improve a child’s ability to produce clearer speech.
- Improve a child’s ability to be understood by others.
- Improve a child’s ability to engage positively with other children and adults.
- Facilitate a child’s interactions with familiar (e.g. family members, peers) and unfamiliar individuals.
- Reduce frustration in a child who struggles with getting their message across.
- Improve spelling and/or writing.

If left treated what can difficulties with articulation (pronunciation and talking) lead to?

When children have difficulties with articulation, they might also have difficulties with:

- Forming friendships and engaging in positive social interactions with peers.
- Completing higher level education tasks.
- Being understood during interactions such as when meeting new people, playing with friends or talking to the teacher.
- Developing literacy skills such as reading and writing.

What type of therapy is recommended for articulation (pronunciation and talking) difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with articulation, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

