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Why is "R" So Hard to Say?

Answers to Questions Parents Ask About the "R" Sound

by Katharine F. Bedsole, M.S., CCC-SLP and Clint M. Johnson, M.A., CCC-SLP

Why is making the "R" sound so hard for some children?



The "R" sound is hard for some children because it is difficult to see the tongue when you say it and it is hard to explain to a child how to make it. Sounds like the "B" in "ball" and the "F" in "fish" are easier because you can show and tell a child to "put your lips together" to make a "B" or "bite your lower lip" to make an "F." Additionally, the "R" sound is difficult because other sounds in the word may influence the way the "R" sounds and the way you say it. Look in the mirror and try saying these words slowly: robin, horn, and cover. Notice how the "R" sound looks and feels different as you say each word. In horn and cover, the "R" sound is different because of the vowels next to it.



Why is making the "R" sound so important?



"R" is important because it is a high frequency sound, meaning that it occurs more often in the English language than other sounds. Only the "N" sound and "T" sound occur more often (Shriberg & Kwiakoski, 1983). A child who has difficulty producing the "R" sound is sometimes hard to understand and may sound immature to his/her peers. This may embarrass the child and make it difficult to speak in social situations.

When should my child produce the "R" sound?



Many children can say a correct "R" sound by the time they are five and a half years old, but some do not produce it until they are seven years old. In general, if your child is not producing the "R" sound by the first grade, you should consult with a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP).

Please note: Many school districts have different criteria for when an SLP can treat an "R" sound. If this is the only sound the child cannot say, some may begin in first grade when the child is six or seven years old, and others may wait until the child is seven or eight years old in second grade.



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What can I do to help?



- **Ask an SLP.** If your child has difficulty saying the “R” sound, you should consult with an SLP. If your child does not have an SLP at his/her school, then you may go to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s (ASHA) website (www.asha.org/findpro) to locate a professional in your area.



- **Play a speech game.** You can help your child to hear the “R” sound by playing this simple game. Say an “R” word correctly (rabbit) or incorrectly (wabbit). See if your child can identify the word with the correct “R” sound. Keep score for every “R” word your child hears correctly. Here is a list of “R” words to get started: *ring, rain, rock, road, rat, wrap, wrist, reach, rule, ride.*



- **Stay positive.** When your child says the “R” sound incorrectly, try not to be negative about it or make them try to repeat it correctly. In most cases, you will only be reinforcing an incorrect production of the “R” sound. His/her inability to produce a correct “R” sound may become frustrating. Instead, restate what your child said, and say the “R” correctly for him/her. For example, if your child says, “That ball is wed,” you can say, “Yes, that is a red ball” and emphasize a correct “R” sound.



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[466 – What’s the Difference? Articulation Disorder vs. Phonological Disorder](#)

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Resources:

Shriberg, L. & Kwiatkoski, J. (1983). Computer assisted natural process analysis (NPA): Recent issues and data. In J. Locke (Ed.), *Assessing and Treating Phonological Disorders: Current Approaches. Seminars in Speech and Language* (Vol. 4), New York: Thieme-Stratton.

Craghead, N., Newman & Secord, W. (1998). *Assessment and Remediation of Articulatory and Phonological Disorders* (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

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