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How Do We Talk?

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How Do We Produce Speech Sounds?



Talking is a form of communication most people use to express their thoughts and feelings. But, do you ever wonder HOW we make the words come out of our mouths? Speaking

begins with a person's thought and results in the formation of words and sentences to express that thought. *The act of speaking occurs by air coming from the lungs, through the vocal folds, and out of the mouth.* We shape sounds using our tongue (tip, blade, front, back), upper and lower lips, upper and lower teeth, and the roof of the mouth (alveolar ridge, palate, velum) in order to say specific sounds and words. Speech sounds differ by voice, place—where sounds are made in the mouth—and *manner*—the type of sound (Trujillo, n.d., ¶ 8).

How Do We Create Different Types of Speech Sounds?



There are many parts of the body that help us produce speech. To speak, you use your stomach muscles, lungs, voice box, tongue, teeth, lips, and even your nose. Your brain coordinates it all. Speech actually starts in the stomach with the diaphragm. This is a large muscle that helps push air from the lungs into the voice box. The voice box or larynx has vocal cords that vibrate to produce your voice. Then, the lips, tongue, and teeth form the sounds to make speech. For example, the tip of the tongue touches just behind your top teeth to make a "d" sound. By moving the tongue, changing how much air comes out, and vibrating or not vibrating the vocal cords, you can make over 40 different speech sounds. Sometimes the sounds even come out through your nose. Try putting your finger on your nose and say "mmm." You will feel your nose vibrate!



What If My Child Has Difficulty Saying Speech Sounds?



Many children experience difficulty when attempting to produce intelligible (clear and understandable) speech. When children struggle with the correct production of speech sounds, it makes it difficult for listeners to understand what they are saying. Speech sound production occurs on a developmental basis according to a child's chronological age. Some children may acquire skills more quickly than others. Mawhinney and McTeague (2004) give the following chart:

90% of Children Have Mastered These Sounds...By Age

p, d, m, w, h, n	2 years old
t, b, k, g	3 years old
f, v, y	4-5 years old
s, z, j, l, r, sh, ch, th, blends	5-7 years old



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(cont.)

What Can I Do to Help My Child?



If you notice non-developmental articulation errors in your child's speech—or your child shows frustration because “No one understands what I'm saying!”—consult a local speech-language pathologist (SLP) for an articulation screening/evaluation of your child's speech production. After reviewing the results of this assessment, the SLP may recommend speech therapy to address specific errors to improve the intelligibility of spontaneous speech.



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[627 – What is Articulation?](#)

[383 – My Child Doesn't Talk Like \(or As Much As\) His Peers](#)

[201 – Types of Articulation Errors – A Simple Guide](#)

[98 – Articulation: When Should I Worry If My Child is Behind?](#)

Resources:

Centre for Continuing Education – The University of Auckland. (n.d.). How do we produce and understand speech. Retrieved November 6, 2009, from <http://www.cce.auckland.ac.nz/FileGet.cfm?ID=5dc9df0c-e2a5-4682-8f79-a330f18f2313>

Mawhinney, L., & McTeague, M. (2004). Early language development. Greenville: Super Duper® Publications.

Trujillo, F. (n.d.). The production of speech sounds. Retrieved November 6, 2009, from http://www.ugr.es/~ftsaez/fonetica/production_speech.pdf

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