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What's the Difference? Articulation Disorder vs. Phonological Disorder

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For a child, learning to speak is a process. He/she may produce a sound incorrectly at first, but will often self-correct through maturity. When a child is unable to self-correct a speech sound, it becomes either an articulation disorder or a phonological disorder, depending on the type of error(s) he/she is producing.

If a child is having difficulty making sounds, he/she is demonstrating an **articulation disorder**. The child is either substituting one sound for another (i.e., saying "woad" for "road"), leaving a sound out completely (i.e., saying "and" for "hand"), or adding and changing sounds. It is important to note that not all substitutions and omissions are speech errors. They could possibly be the result of a regional dialect or accent.



When a child is producing patterns of sound errors, he/she is demonstrating a **phonological disorder**. For example:



- **Fronting** – a sound made in the back of the mouth is replaced with a sound made in the front of the mouth, which results in saying "tee" for "key"



- **Cluster reduction** – child leaves out a sound in a word, such as "bock" for "block"



- **Velar assimilation** – saying "kack" for "tack"



- **Nasal assimilation** – saying "money" for "funny"



- **Stopping** – saying "dump" for "jump"

- **Gliding** – saying "wabbit" for "rabbit"

- **Deaffrication** – saying "shop" for "chop"

- **Weak syllable** – saying "nana" for "banana"

- **Final consonant deletion** – saying "bu" for "bus"

Consult a speech-language pathologist (SLP) if you think your child/student is having trouble with his/her speech. The SLP will administer formal and/or informal articulation testing, and may perform an oral mechanism examination to determine whether the muscles in the mouth are working correctly.

When the evaluation is complete, the SLP will write a report and determine if services are recommended for the child based on the overall communication evaluation.

As a reminder, most children struggle with certain sounds when learning to speak. Sounds are developmental, and children become more articulate with age. However, it's important to pay attention to your child's speech and contact a speech-language pathologist for an evaluation.

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