

Phonology

What is Phonology? Phonology can be described as an aspect of language that deals with rules for the structure and sequencing of speech sounds. Every language has a wide variety of speech sounds (phonemes). For example in English, the *ng* sound, as in *ring*, will never appear at the beginning of a word. Phonology rules also determine which sounds may be combined. For example, the combination of *dn* will not appear in sequence in the same syllable.

What are phonological Processes? Phonological processes are patterns of speech found in many typically developing children. For example, *weak syllable deletion* is when a child deletes syllables from a multisyllabic word. A child may say, *nana* rather than saying, *banana*, a child may also delete final consonants from words, *cu* for *cup*. Phonological processes become problematic when they do not disappear by a certain age. There is developmental data that indicates when phonological processes typically disappear. There are different norms for different processes.

What is the difference between an articulation disorder and a phonological disorder? Most professionals characterize a child with an articulation disorder as someone who has difficulty producing a few phonemes and the child's errors may be linked to oral motor weakness and/or normal development. A phonological disorder may be characterized as a child who has numerous phoneme errors that can usually be grouped into categories (phonological processes), and they are usually not linked to oral motor difficulties and/or normal development.

What may speech therapy be like for a child with a phonological disorder? There are various therapy approaches for phonological disorders. One approach is to focus on the phonological processes rather than focusing therapy on remediating errors phoneme-by-phoneme. For example, if a child presents with final consonant deletion, then all final consonants may be targeted during therapy. The goal is to teach the child that the meaning changes when final consonants are left off. This may be done through play, using pictures, and/or using minimal word pairs. Minimal pair therapy is when you show a child two pictures representing words that differ by only one sound. If you are targeting the phonological process of final consonant deletion, then the target pictures would be one picture of an object ending in a vowel and one picture of an object ending with a final consonant. For example, *toe/toad*, *my/mile*, *ray/rain* etc. The clinician would show the child the 2 pictures and ask the child to point to *toe* and then point to *toad*. The clinician would be looking to see if the child understands that the two words have different meanings. The clinician would then move on to have the child practice saying the words appropriately.

What is phonological awareness? Phonological awareness can be described as an understanding of the ways in which speech can be manipulated and divided into smaller parts. This includes: rhyming; segmenting words and syllables; along with blending sounds and syllables. Improving phonological awareness skills has been shown to help with reading readiness skills and improve literacy development.

If you suspect your child has a phonological disorder, you may want to contact a speech-language pathologist for a full evaluation.