

Speech sound difficulties.

As children are learning to talk their sound system develops gradually and they can make errors as they learn to say new words. As a rough guide children's speech should be understood about 50% of the time at the age of two and 75-100% at the age of three.

Sometimes children do not master the sounds we would expect by a particular age and as a result their speech can be unclear and difficult to understand. Often they can make progress with support and practice but sometimes their difficulties can be longer lasting.

Speech sound difficulties can be a result of:

1. Articulation difficulties

The child has a difficulty producing specific sounds in isolation.

2. Phonological delay

There are a range of speech sound errors which are typical in a child's development up until a certain age. When children continue to make errors past this point they are said to have a phonological delay. This means their system is developing along typical lines, but at a slower rate.

*Note that a child may have both an articulation and a phonological difficulty.

3. Consistent phonological disorder

The child's speech contains unusual patterns not found in the speech of younger, typically developing children.

4. Inconsistent phonological disorder

The child's speech shows a high degree of variability and they will produce a target word in different ways.

5. Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia

Developmental verbal dyspraxia (DVD) is a diagnosis given to children with a severe speech disorder who do not appear to respond to traditional therapy approaches.

These children have difficulty in making and coordinating the precise movements needed to produce clear speech. There is no damage to nerves or muscles but children are unable to create accurate speech movements. They tend to have a limited range of speech sounds, may overuse a particular sound and will also have inconsistent and unusual errors. They may also have difficulties sequencing sounds together in the right order.

A diagnosis for DVD can be quite complicated as it is an unfolding condition, so as children make progress their difficulties can change. Children with disordered speech sound development can also show characteristics of Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia. Children with Verbal Dyspraxia require intensive support and their progress is often quite slow. Some children can also have difficulties moving their mouths, lips and tongue for things like eating and may find it hard to co-ordinate body movements.