

I'm not a bot



When children learn to speak, they need to use a wide range of sounds. However, due to the complexity of speech sounds and the cognitive demands of language learning, children may experience difficulties producing and perceiving certain sounds. So, children pronounce words the best way they can. That is why children pronounce words like rain as wain or plane as pane. While this may be cute, it is a normal aspect of language learning that is worth examining. Children do this because they are learning to synchronize the movements of their tongue, lips, jaw, teeth, and palate in order to produce speech sounds, and all children make errors in their speech sounds during this process. Phonological processes are patterns of sound substitutions that children employ to simplify their speech. Phonological processes are the predictable patterns of speech errors used by typically developing children to simplify their speech as they learn to talk. While young, children hear the speech sounds of the language being used around them but are unable to produce all of them yet. This is because they do not possess the ability to coordinate the tongue, lips, teeth, palate, and jaw for clear speech. Therefore, they simplify complex words in predictable ways until they develop the coordination necessary to articulate clearly. As a result, their speech does not resemble that of adults. It would be overwhelming for a young child's brain to attempt to speak with all of the sounds an adult can produce. To make speaking easier, the child's brain develops rules, known as phonological processes, to simplify speech sounds and make words easier to say. For instance, producing sounds at the back of the mouth, such as /k/ and /g/, can be challenging for young children. Many children simplify this by implementing a rule (the phonological process) that says that for a sound produced at the back of the mouth, change it to a sound produced at the front of the mouth (where it's easier). As a result, /k/ becomes /t/ and /g/ becomes /d/. This explains why it's typical for young children to say "titty tat" instead of "kitty cat." It's important to note that these rules are beyond the child's control. They do not choose to omit consonants at the end of words or alter sounds. Their brain does it automatically, and they may not even be aware that they're doing it. At certain ages, we anticipate that children will use phonological processes. Its only a problem when children don't attempt to outgrow the use of these processes beyond the typical period. While most children naturally outgrow this stage, others may require speech therapy to overcome it. All children use some types of phonological processes. Let us explore the types so that you can understand how they work. Here are some types of typical phonological processes: Assimilation is a phonological process in which a sound becomes more similar to a neighboring sound in a word, due to the influence of that neighboring sound. For example, if a child says "gog" instead of "dog", this is an example of assimilation, as the /g/ sound becomes more like the following /d/ sound in the word. Another example is when a child says "baba" instead of "bottle", where the /t/ sound is replaced by the /b/ sound from the previous syllable. This is known as regressive assimilation. Assimilation is a common phonological process that occurs when one sound in a word is influenced by another sound and becomes more similar to it. Here are some examples of assimilation in children: Nasal Assimilation: This occurs when a non-nasal consonant becomes nasal due to the influence of a neighboring nasal consonant. For example, the word "tent" may be pronounced as "temt" because of the influence of the nasal "m" sound. Labial Assimilation: This occurs when a non-labial consonant becomes a labial consonant due to the influence of a neighboring labial consonant. For example, the word "cup" may be pronounced as "pup" because of the influence of the labial "p" sound. Velar Assimilation: This occurs when a non-velar consonant becomes a velar consonant due to the influence of a neighboring velar consonant. For example, the word "dog" may be pronounced as "gog" because of the influence of the velar "g" sound. Voicing Assimilation: This occurs when a voiceless consonant becomes voiced due to the influence of a neighboring voiced consonant. For example, the word "cat" may be pronounced as "gat" because of the influence of the voiced "g" sound. Devoicing Assimilation: This occurs when a voiced consonant becomes voiceless due to the influence of a neighboring voiceless consonant. For example, the word "bed" may be pronounced as "pet" because of the influence of the voiceless "p" sound. Dissimilation is a phonological process in which a child changes a sound in a word to make it more distinct from another sound in the same word. The goal of dissimilation is to make the word easier to say or to avoid a difficult sound sequence. For example, a child might pronounce the word "yellow" as "yewlow" to avoid the difficult sequence of two "l" sounds. Similarly, the child might pronounce the word "spaghetti" as "basgetti" to avoid the difficult sequence of two "s" sounds. Dissimilation is a common phonological process in young children's speech development, and it typically disappears as their speech becomes more mature. Parents and caregivers can help children overcome dissimilation by modeling correct pronunciation and providing gentle correction when needed. There are several types of dissimilation that can occur in children's speech. Here are some examples: Regressive dissimilation: In this type of dissimilation, a sound that comes later in the word influences the sound that comes after it. For example, a child might pronounce the word "banana" as "banano" because the second "n" sound is influenced by the first "n" sound. Total dissimilation: In this type of dissimilation, a sound is completely changed or eliminated from the word. For example, a child might pronounce the word "spoon" as "poon" because the "s" sound is eliminated. Partial dissimilation: In this type of dissimilation, a sound is changed only slightly from its original pronunciation. For example, a child might pronounce the word "water" as "wawa" because the "t" sound is changed to a "w" sound. These types of dissimilation can occur in combination with other phonological processes, such as deletion, substitution, and addition, as children develop their speech skills. Deletion is a common phonological process in which a child omits or leaves out a sound or syllable in a word. This process is a natural part of children's speech development as they learn to produce more complex sounds and syllables. There are several types of deletion that can occur in children's speech: Final consonant deletion: In this type of deletion, a child leaves off the final consonant in a word. For example, the word "cat" may be pronounced as "ca." Cluster reduction: In this type of deletion, a child leaves off one or more consonants in a consonant cluster. For example, the word "stop" may be pronounced as "top." Cluster reduction is a phonological process in which a child simplifies a group of consonant sounds by turning them into a single sound or a more manageable combination of sounds, as seen in examples like "poon" for "spoon" and "tuck" for "truck." Typically, this process should resolve by age 4 for words without /s/ and by age 5 for words with /s/. Syllable deletion: In this type of deletion, a child leaves off an entire syllable in a word. Weak Syllable Deletion is a phonological process in which a child deletes an unstressed syllable in a word, such as saying "nana" for "banana" or "puter" for "computer." Typically, this process resolves by the age of 4. Unstressed syllable deletion: In this type of deletion, a child leaves off an unstressed syllable in a word. For example, the word "potato" may be pronounced as "tato." It's important to note that while deletion is a normal part of children's speech development, it should decrease as a child's speech becomes more mature. If a child is still exhibiting significant deletion patterns past a certain age (typically around 4-5 years old), it may be a sign of a speech or language disorder and professional intervention may be needed. Epenthesis is a phonological process where a child inserts a sound or a syllable in between two sounds in a word. This is a common occurrence in young children who are still developing their language skills. For example, a child might say "buh-lue" instead of "blue" or "su-pas-ghetti" instead of "spaghetti." The child is inserting an extra sound in the middle of the word to make it easier to pronounce. Epenthesis is a normal part of language development, and most children grow out of it by the age of four or five. However, if a child continues to use epenthesis beyond this age or if it is accompanied by other speech difficulties, it may be a sign of a speech or language disorder and professional intervention may be required. Metathesis is a phonological process where a child switches the order of two sounds in a word. This is a common occurrence in young children who are still developing their language skills. For example, a child might say "aminial" instead of "animal." The child is switching the positions of the "n" and "m" sounds in the word. Metathesis is a normal part of language development, and most children grow out of it by the age of four or five. However, if a child continues to use metathesis beyond this age or if it is accompanied by other speech difficulties, it may be a sign of a speech or language disorder and professional intervention may be required. If a child continues to exhibit phonological processes beyond the expected age range, or if the child uses an excessive amount of phonological processes that hinder their speech intelligibility, it could be a sign of a phonological disorder. It can be challenging to cope with having a child whose speech is unintelligible to others, as this can lead to frustration for the child. Children with phonological disorders may exhibit tantrums, such as crying, screaming, sighing loudly, stomping, or throwing objects. They may display "aggressive" behaviors, such as biting, hitting, pulling, and shoving, often due to feeling misunderstood and unable to effectively communicate their wants and needs. These behaviors not only affect the child but also the parent or caregiver. However, parents can take solace in knowing that most children will exhibit improved speech intelligibility over time, and speech-language pathologists and their teams are available to help. Consistent speech therapy can be highly effective in targeting phonological processes, leading to faster improvements in speech intelligibility. If you fear that your child has not mastered phonological processes and is still using them, or that there may be some phonological disorders, please get help. For example, you can join our childhood literacy programs. These programs focus on childhood development of essential skills through group learning, therapy, and so on. Consult with a speech-language pathologist (SLP). An SLP can assess the child's speech and provide a diagnosis of the phonological disorder. They can also develop a personalized treatment plan to target specific areas of difficulty. You can also sign your child up for consistent speech therapy with an SLP. Regular speech therapy sessions can help children improve their speech sounds and intelligibility. The SLP will work with the child to practice correct sound production and may use activities and games to make the therapy sessions engaging and fun. As the child progresses, encouraging and praising their efforts can boost their confidence and motivation to continue working on their speech. Parents and caregivers can provide positive feedback for correct sounds and offer gentle correction for incorrect sounds. It is always joyful to watch children develop their speech skills. If a child is still exhibiting significant deletion patterns past a certain age (typically around 4-5 years old), it may be a sign of a speech or language disorder and professional intervention may be needed. As I mentioned before, all children use some phonological processes in their speech. These are considered natural or normal phonological processes. However, in children with phonological disorders, we sometimes see other phonological processes being used that are atypical or abnormal. We call these atypical phonological processes or idiosyncratic phonological processes. These are different from the ones we see in typically-developing children. These can be red flags that there may be something wrong with the child's phonological system. Children who use these processes should be checked out by a speech-language pathologist. Examples of Atypical Phonological Processes: Initial Consonant Deletion (og for dog) Backing (moving front sounds like /t/ and /d/ to the back of the mouth like /k/ and /g/) Glottal Replacement (ba er for hammer) Fricatives Replacing Stops (sop for top) Stopping of glides (darn for yam) Vowel Error Patterns How to Treat Phonological Disorders: If a child is having trouble with phonological processes in that he is using normal ones beyond when he should or is using atypical processes, we consider that child to have a phonological disorder. To treat this problem, our job is to re-train the child's brain to overwrite the rule that he/she has created. This is typically done in speech therapy sessions with a licensed speech-language pathologist. Here are the steps for fixing this: Listening: First, the child must hear the difference between his errors and the correct production. Speaking Words: Next, the child must say the words without using the phonological process. Speaking Sentences: Once the child can say the specific words, he must use those words in sentences. Structured Conversation: Now, the child must practice not using the process during longer speaking situations, such as answering a question or telling about a past event. Carry-Over: Only once you've done all of that can you work on helping the child remember to not use the process in every-day speech. If a child speaks with a lot of different phonological processes, or if they are very hard to understand, The Cycles Approach to Phonology is a great therapy method that will provide some structure to your sessions. Here's the Penny Game for Phonological Therapy: Check out this video with a great game you can play using minimal pairs. In this game, you will hide a penny under one of the pictures and help the child hear or speak the difference between the two words (targeting the phonological error that they are exhibiting). Click play below to watch! You can download your own guide to teaching a child a whole class of sounds: Reference: Paul, R. (2007). Language disorders from infancy through adolescence: Assessment & intervention. St. Louis: Mosby. Check out our additional resources for treating phonological processes: Podcast: Play in new window | Download | Embed Subscribe: Apple Podcasts | RSS This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. Learn how your comment data is processed. Have you ever heard a kiddo call a rabbit a wabbit or refer to a banana as nana? These cute ways of speaking pinpoint a cool part of how kids pick up language called phonological processes. Diving into this topic helps us unlock the mysteries behind how youngsters master the art of sound and start stringing words together. Phonological processes are the natural adjustments children make as they acquire the complex rules of speech. These processes are essential for their verbal development and usually disappear as they grow older. By recognizing and understanding these patterns, you can better support a child's language journey and address any concerns early on. Definition and Importance: Phonological processes are systematic modifications in children's speech as they simplify complex adult speech patterns. These processes are critical for normal language development and usually diminish as children mature. Types of Processes: There are three primary types of phonological processes: Substitution (replacing one sound class with another), Assimilation (altering sounds to resemble neighboring sounds), and Syllable Structure (modifying the syllable structure of words). Common Examples: Typical phonological processes include syllable reduction (e.g., banana to nana), final consonant deletion (e.g., cat to ca), and cluster reduction (e.g., spoon to poon). Signs for Professional Help: Persistent use of these processes beyond typical age ranges, unintelligible speech by age four, and lack of phonemic awareness by age five are indicators that a child may need to see a speech-language pathologist. Impact on Literacy: Phonological processes can affect children's reading and writing abilities. Difficulty in handling these processes can lead to challenges with spelling, reading comprehension, and fluency. Support Strategies: Encouraging phonemic awareness activities, using visual aids, and consulting speech-language pathologists are essential strategies for supporting children's phonological development and ensuring effective language learning. Phonological processes are critical for understanding how children develop speech. They represent predictable patterns that simplify adult speech sounds while the child's phonological system matures. Phonological processes are systematic modifications of speech sounds. Children use these processes to make pronunciation easier. These modifications fall into three main categories: Substitution Processes: Replacing one class of sounds with another, like saying tat for cat. Assimilation Processes: One sound takes on the properties of another, like gog for dog. Syllable Structure Processes: Alterations that affect the syllable structure, like nana for banana. Dog might become gog (regressive), and bus changes to bub (progressive). While phonological processes are typical in early childhood, ongoing signs suggest it's time to consult a speech-language pathologist. Extended Use of Processes: If a child continues to use phonological processes past the age norms, it may indicate a speech disorder. For example, final consonant deletion is common until age three but should reduce significantly thereafter. Unintelligible Speech: When a child's speech is difficult to understand by non-family members by age four. Lack of Phonemic Awareness: Difficulty recognizing or manipulating sounds in words, such as rhyming or breaking words into syllables, by age five. Monitoring and understanding these signs can ensure early and effective intervention, aiding smoother language development. Phonological processes significantly influence children's ability to learn and use language effectively. Understanding these processes helps in identifying and supporting children's linguistic development. Phonological processes shape how children decode and encode sounds, affecting their reading and writing skills. If children struggle with phonological processes, they may find it challenging to differentiate and produce sounds correctly, which can hinder spelling and word recognition. For example, a child who simplifies spoon to poon might have difficulties spelling the word accurately. Moreover, issues with processes like consonant cluster reduction or final consonant deletion can lead to mistakes in reading comprehension and fluency. Early intervention and phonological awareness training are essential to mitigate these impacts, ensuring smoother acquisition of literacy skills. Implement targeted strategies to support children's phonological development. Encourage phonemic awareness activities like segmenting and blending sounds, which reinforce the understanding of sound structures. Utilize visual aids and repetitive exercises to help children grasp sound patterns effectively. Engaging in nursery rhymes and word-play games fosters auditory discrimination and sound manipulation skills. Additionally, consulting speech-language pathologists can provide specialized guidance tailored to individual children's needs, aiding in the correction of persistent phonological process issues. Early, consistent engagement in these strategies ensures children develop strong foundational language skills, promoting successful reading and writing development. Understanding phonological processes is crucial for supporting your child's speech and literacy development. By recognizing the signs early and employing effective strategies, you can help mitigate potential challenges. Engaging in activities that promote phonemic awareness and using visual aids can make a significant difference. Early intervention and consistent practice are key to ensuring your child builds strong foundational language skills. Remember, your proactive approach can set the stage for their successful literacy journey. Phonological processes are patterns of sound errors young children use as they develop their speech and language skills. Examples include substituting one sound for another or assimilating sounds within a word. These processes are common in early childhood but typically decrease as children age. Phonological processes can impact speech clarity and intelligibility. Persistent use beyond the typical age range might indicate a speech sound disorder, requiring professional evaluation and intervention to support normal speech development. Early recognition of speech issues allows for timely intervention, which is crucial for minimizing long-term effects on communication skills. Early intervention can significantly enhance outcomes in speech development and prevent future academic challenges. Difficulties with phonological processes can hinder spelling, word recognition, and reading comprehension. Children may struggle to decode words accurately, leading to issues in literacy development and overall academic performance. Effective strategies include phonemic awareness activities, using visual aids, and engaging in word-play games. These activities help children understand the sound structures of language and improve their ability to manipulate sounds, which is essential for reading and writing skills. Phonemic awareness is crucial for literacy as it involves the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in words. It forms the foundation for reading and spelling by enabling children to connect sounds with their written symbols. Visual aids support phonological development by providing visual representations of sounds and words, helping children to better understand and remember the relationship between phonemes and their corresponding letters or letter patterns. Word-play games make learning about sounds and words fun and engaging, which can motivate children to participate actively. Such games encourage the practice of phonemic skills in a playful, low-pressure environment, enhancing their phonological awareness. Early intervention is key to addressing speech and phonological issues before they become entrenched. By engaging children in targeted activities and therapies early on, we can set the stage for successful language acquisition and literacy development. Originally posted May 3, 2013. Updated September 18, 2024. We've talked a lot about helping kids with articulation disorders here on Mommy Speech Therapy. I've shared my Articulation Screener to help you identify the sounds kids are saying in error as well as an Articulation Goal Tracker to help select the sounds that need to be targeted and keep track of progress. But what if your child has so many sound errors you don't know where to start, or they are so difficult to understand you don't know how to help them? If this is the case they may have more than an articulation delay, they may have a phonological disorder characterized by the presence of phonological processes beyond what would be expected. What are Phonological Processes? Phonological processes are patterns of sound errors that typically developing children use to simplify speech as they are learning to talk. They do this because they don't have the ability to coordinate the lips, tongue, teeth, palate and jaw for clear speech. As a result they simplify complex words in predictable ways until they develop the coordination required to articulate clearly. For example, they may reduce consonant clusters to a single consonant like, pane for plane or delete the weak syllable in a word saying, nana for banana. There are many different patterns of simplifications or phonological processes. You can download my FREE Phonological Processes Chart HERE or click the link below. This chart lists common phonological processes and an approximate age at which children should no longer be using them. What is a phonological disorder? These processes are considered normal unless they persist beyond the age when most typically developing children have stopped using them. For example if your 4 year old still uses the phonological process of reduplication (saying, wawa for water) that would be considered delayed since most children stop using that process by the time they turn 3. A phonological delay may also be considered if the processes the child is using are different than what would be expected. For example, if your child leaves all of the beginning sounds off of his/her words it would be considered a delay since initial consonant deletion is not common in typical development. The excessive use of phonological processes can also indicate a phonological disorder because when multiple phonological processes are exhibited together it usually increases the child's unintelligibility making them really difficult to understand. As a result, if you have a highly unintelligible child they're likely to have a phonological delay, and their phonological skills should be assessed when considering a treatment plan. If you're uncertain as to how intelligible your child should be based on their age, the standard guideline is by 2 years old a child should be 50% intelligible to an unfamiliar listener. By 3 years old they should be 75% intelligible to an unfamiliar listener and by 4-5 years old they should be close to 100% intelligible to an unfamiliar listener even if a few articulation errors are still present in their speech. Refer to the speech sound intelligibility chart HERE. Articulation or Phonological Disorder? Since phonological disorders and articulation disorders are both speech sound disorders it can sometimes be tricky to know which speech sound disorder is present. Here are a few tips on how to tell the difference. A speech sound disorder is considered an articulation disorder when: Speech sound errors persist beyond what is developmentally appropriate. Refer to the Speech Sound Development Chart for details. A child is mild to moderately unintelligible. Children with an articulation disorder typically respond well to a traditional articulation therapy approach where one sound is targeted at a time. For a guide on traditional articulation therapy refer to The Process of Articulation Therapy. As described above, a speech sound disorder is considered a phonological disorder when: Phonological processes persist beyond the typical age of development. You can refer to the Phonological Processes Chart for details. Phonological processes are used that are not seen in typical development. A child is highly unintelligible due to the excessive use of phonological processes. Treatment for Phonological Disorders: Remediation for kids with phonological disorders usually involves targeting the phonological processes in error as determined by the speech language pathologist. Targeting the phonological processes, as opposed to targeting each error sound by sound as you would in a traditional articulation approach, usually improves speech intelligibility at a faster rate for kids with phonological disorders. If you suspect your child may have a phonological disorder or you are concerned about your child's speech intelligibility you should contact a speech language pathologist for an evaluation. As always, I wish your kids the very best in becoming successful communicators and with your help and support I know they can! February 20, 2023 Laura Gencarella Owner, Speaking Sensory LLC As your toddler starts to learn language and practice speaking, you may have noticed them making changes to words in order to simplify their pronunciation. This is known as phonological processes, and it is an important part of language development in young children. Phonological processes are sound errors that typically developing children use to simplify language as they learn to speak. A phonological disorder occurs when these processes persist beyond the age at which most children have stopped using them. Treatment usually involves targeting these processes instead of addressing each error individually, and early intervention is key for successful communication abilities in the future. This usually helps improve speech intelligibility at a faster rate since it takes into account more complex speech issues. It is important to note that proper assessment and early intervention are key when it comes to successful communication abilities later in life. Generally, by two years old a child should be 50% intelligible to an unfamiliar listener, by three years old 75% intelligible, and by four or five years old nearly 100% intelligible with some individual articulation errors still present in their speech. Please refer to the chart below, thanks to Mommy Speech Therapy, for a visual guide of the specific substitutions, additions, omissions and deletions that are typical, and ages they should be extinguished. As previously stated, these patterns are normal and often encouraged when children are learning to speak. You may have heard your child say nana for banana, tat for cat, or do for dog, all of which are considered appropriate simplifications until a certain age. If your child is still exhibiting these patterns after the ages listed above, they would likely benefit from a speech/language evaluation! Sometimes, children will use simplification patterns that are linked to more complex concerns, such as initial consonant deletion (up for cup) and backing, such as goo for do). If your child is exhibiting these speech patterns consistently, please follow up with a speech language pathologist and request an evaluation to discuss next steps, and maximize treatment outcomes in the future. Contact us today to see if your child's speech patterns are considered typical for their age or if they would benefit from skilled intervention! Did this help you understand if phonological processes are normal for your child's age range? Were here for you!

What are the different phonological processes. List of phonological processes with examples. Normal phonological development. Phonological processes norms. List of phonological processes. What are the phonological processes.