



## What is a Phonological Process?



Phonology is the rules for combining sounds to form words in a language. These rules for combining sounds are called patterns. When a child's speech is difficult to understand, it may be due to a phonological disorder, which is different than an articulation disorder. Having a phonological disorder does NOT mean that the child has difficulty pronouncing the sounds of a language, but rather, the child has difficulty understanding how to use these sounds in words. Instead of using the correct patterns in a word, the child simplifies these rules. This pattern simplification is called a phonological process. All children simplify as they learn the rules of the language. Babies initially produce the words "bottle" as "baba" because they are simplifying the sounds and patterns to make the word easier to produce. A child with a phonological disorder "gets stuck" in this simplification process and does not move on to develop the correct use of the rules of language. Some patterns are considered "developmental" as these patterns are common and will likely disappear as a child matures. However, some patterns can be signs of a phonological disorder. This means that a child consistently produces patterns that are not usually made by other children of the same age. The school speech-language pathologist can help to distinguish between developmental patterns and phonological disorders.

Any present phonological patterns are analyzed based on the following developmental norms established through research and recommended criteria through professional norms and state and national organizations:

<u>By Age:</u>	<u>Phonological processes disappearing:</u>	
3.0	final consonant deletion	(bow/boat)
3.0	stopping	(toap/soap, pish/fish)
4.0	cluster reduction	(bue/blue, poon/spoon)
4.0	fronting	(tup/cup, do/go)
5.0	depalatalization	(tear/chair, dump/jump)
6.0	gliding of initial liquids	(white/light, wock/rock)

Children who continue to have difficulty with sound patterns after the specific ages listed above may be eligible for speech-language therapy. This is a service provided at school during the regular school day. District 200 also offers an Early Childhood Phonology Class to provide intensive speech-language therapy addressing only phonological processes within a classroom setting for those students who qualify.

Parents and caregivers can help their children improve pronunciation by not being overly concerned about mistakes and by providing good models with their own speaking. In day-to-day conversation, words that are simplified can be echoed back in correct form by the parent or caregiver without pressuring the child to repeat the words. Also, providing auditory awareness of the difference between correct versus incorrect production can help a child to develop an understanding of the correct pattern, such as talking about the difference between when you say "top" versus when you say "stop"—this changes the meaning of the word! Praise for attempts at correct patterns when it occurs will help the child to improve without hindering his joy of talking and sharing.