Lisping Encyclopedia Article

Lisping

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Lisping

A disorder of speech articulation involving the inability to pronounce one or more sibilant consonant sounds, usually s *or* z, *correctly.*

Lisping is a speech disorder characterized by the inability to pronounce the sounds of s or z, known as the sibilant consonants, correctly. Usually *th* sounds are substituted for the sibilants; the word "lisp," for example, would be pronounced "lithp" by someone with this speech disorder. Sometimes there are also problems with *sh* and *ch* sounds. Many children lisp at certain stages of speech development, especially when they lose their front primary teeth. This frontal or interdental lisp, produced when the tongue protrudes through the front teeth, is the most familiar type of lisp. Sibilant production may be interfered with in a number of other ways as well. These are all classified as lisping and include excessive pressure by the tongue against the teeth; the tongue held too far back along the midline of the palate; and a "substitute hiss" produced in the throat or larynx.

Lisping has a variety of causes, both physiological and psychological. Physiological causes include structural irregularities of the tongue, palate, or teeth (including abnormalities in the number or position of teeth) and mild hearing loss involving high frequencies. In some cases, a child with no physical abnormality will develop a lisp by imitating another child or an adult who lisps. Lisping is also associated with immaturity: in some cases children will deliberately adopt a babyish lisp as a form of psychological regression. Unless it has psychological causes, lisping in children under the age of eight is considered a part of normal speech development and is usually not a cause for concern. However, if a child eight years of age or older lisps, evaluation by a speech-language pathologist is generally recommended. If untreated, lisping can persist into adulthood.

For Further Study

Books

Barach, Carol. *Help Me Say It: A Parent's Guide to Speech Problems.* New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

Cantwell, Dennis P. *Developmental Speech and Language Disorders.* New York: Guilford Press, 1987.

Hanson, Marvin L. *Articulation.* Philadelphia: Saunders, 1983. Lass, N. J., L. V. McReynolds, and J. L. Northern. *Handbook on Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology.* Philadelphia: B. C. Decker, 1988.

Shames, G., and E. Wiig, eds. *Human Communication Disorders: An Introduction.* Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill Publishing Co., 1982.

Sommers, Ronald K. *Articulation Disorders.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1983.

Organizations

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
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Telephone: (301) 897-5700