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Do Missing Teeth Affect Speech?

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One question that parents often have is “Will my child have a lisp if he loses his front teeth?” There are many oral structures that play a role in producing speech: the vocal tract, lips, tongue, teeth, and cheeks. Some play a bigger role than others, but they are all important. When one is missing, such as teeth, there is a chance that speech may be affected.

A natural part of children getting older is that they lose baby teeth and grow permanent teeth. They will go through phases of having gaps in their smiles and having incorrect bites. Sometimes these changes may negatively affect how children produce certain sounds. There are several English sounds that depend on using the teeth for correct articulation:



If a child can correctly produce a sound before teeth are lost, the child will likely keep that skill and be able to produce the sound when the permanent teeth grow in. When baby teeth are missing, sounds may be distorted; however, this is usually temporary and will often correct itself when the permanent teeth grow in.

If, however, a child has an articulation disorder, then missing teeth or an incorrect bite can make articulation more difficult. This is because structures in the child’s mouth may not be ideal for speech sound production. In this case, it is important to consult with a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) and an orthodontist. Sometimes SLPs will recommend waiting to treat a lisp until a child’s permanent teeth grow in, which could take weeks or months, to have more ideal structures in the mouth to help with articulation. An SLP and orthodontist may collaborate together to provide a treatment plan that will best fit your child’s needs.

	F – “feet” V – “van”
	S – “soup” Z – “zoom”
	CH – “chair” SH – “shape”
	J – “jump”
	ZH – “treasure”
	Voiceless TH – “think”
	Voiced TH – “the”

Resources:

“How Dentition Affects Articulation,” North Shore Pediatric Therapy, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://nspt4kids.com/parenting/how-dentition-affects-articulation/>.

“Lisps and Missing Front Teeth,” Marshella Speech & Language, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://pammarshalla.com/lisps-and-missing-front-teeth/>

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