

Preschoolers correct speaking mistakes even when talking to themselves

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Louis Manfra, assistant professor of human development and family sciences, says to help children repair their private speech, adults should model speech repair behaviors by talking aloud while working on a task. Credit: University of Missouri-Columbia

One of the differences between adults and preschoolers when it comes to private speech is that adults typically talk to themselves in their heads, while preschoolers talk to themselves aloud, particularly while playing or working on a task. Private speech is a good thing for a child's cognitive development; however, it may be important that children monitor and repair errors in their speech, even when talking to themselves. Louis Manfra, assistant professor in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Missouri, found that children do, in fact, monitor their speech for errors, even without a listener. Manfra says

parents and caregivers might encourage preschool-aged children to monitor their private speech by demonstrating such behavior in their own aloud private speech.

"A disconnection between private speech and task behavior has been observed in studies of children with self-regulation issues, such as ADHD," Manfra said. "What was unknown until now was the extent to which preschool-aged children correct their own speech, and if they do so when talking to themselves. This is important because children who do not repair their speech may not benefit as much from their private speech as children who consistently repair their private speech."

Manfra studied three-and four-year-old children to investigate their speech behaviors. The children worked on a project with building blocks, a problem-solving task known to elicit private speech. The children talked through the project with someone and then alone. In assessing speech errors and self-repairs during social and private speech, Manfra found that approximately eight percent of preschoolers' utterances made during problem-solving tasks contained errors and self-repairs. Moreover, he found that children made errors and repairs both while talking through the task with another person and alone, providing evidence that they monitor speech for themselves, just as adults do.

"Adults often struggle to find the right word or have breaks in their speech as they think through a task," Manfra said. "Though they make corrections, they often internalize those corrections, talking to themselves in their head rather than aloud. To help children repair their private speech, adults working with children should model speech repair behaviors by talking aloud while working on a task. Doing so will help children realize that even without a listener present, speech errors should be corrected."

"Speech monitoring and repairs in preschool [children](#)'s social and private

speech," recently was published in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Shannon Tyler with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and Adam Winsler from George Mason University contributed to the study.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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