

# PROSODY 101

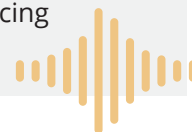
PROSODY OF SPEECH refers to the pitch, volume, and tempo of our speech. In other words, it is all of the extra things we do with our voices to express ourselves while we're saying words. It's how our voices go up at the end of a question, how we place extra emphasis on the word "really" when we talk about how much we want ice cream, and how we know that our friend is disappointed even though she says "it's fine." Prosody is sometimes referred to as the melody of speech, and just like a note that is off-key, it is noticeable when it's not quite working.

## WHAT ROLE DOES PROSODY PLAY IN COMMUNICATION?

When we have trouble understanding prosody, we can miss out on all sorts of valuable information people are trying to share with us. When we have a hard time using prosody, we can send messages we don't intend to our friends, family, and anyone else we talk to.

## WHAT DOES "NORMAL" PROSODY SOUND LIKE?

There is a wide range of what our brains consider typical when we're listening to another speaker. There is variation between people of different ages, genders, and cultures, and there is no one "right" way to be. Generally, if you're listening to someone and you're struggling to understand their message because you're distracted by the pitch, volume, or tempo of their speech, then the speaker may be experiencing challenges with the prosody of speech.



## WHY DO SOME PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH PROSODY?

Understanding and using prosody is thought to be a complex neurological task that involves many parts of the brain interacting and communicating with one another. It is not uncommon for people who are experiencing neurological differences -- including autism, childhood apraxia of speech, developmental language delay, central auditory processing disorder, and hearing loss -- to also experience challenges related to prosody.

## WHAT IS THE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF PROSODY?

Students who experience challenges related to prosody may struggle both academically and socially. If a student has difficulty understanding or using prosody, they may have a hard time:

- ★ following classroom instructions
- ★ understanding expectations that are conveyed with pitch, volume, and tempo rather than exact words
- ★ answering questions in class
- ★ expressing their knowledge verbally,
- ★ asking and answering questions in the classroom
- ★ completing assignments that require verbal presentation of information
- ★ establishing and maintaining relationships with peers



## WHEN SHOULD AN SLP ADDRESS PROSODY?



An SLP can be a valuable resource when a person's use or understanding of prosody adversely impacts their participation in a full, happy life. A person experiencing prosody challenges can work together with an SLP to understand and even learn to modify their speech patterns if they so choose.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF SOMEONE I KNOW HAS PROSODY CHALLENGES?

First and foremost, it is important to keep unconditional acceptance and support in the front of your mind and consider the impact of anything you might say or do. Remember, differences are what make all of us special. Disabilities limit a person's full participation in society. If you think a person's use or understanding of prosody is restricting their involvement in life, contact an SLP.

An SLP can help you better understand what's going on and can give advice on what to do next. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association's ProFinder is an excellent place to look for an SLP if you're unsure where to start

<https://www.asha.org/profind/>.

**PROSODY - IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY,  
IT'S HOW YOU SAY IT**



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