

Frequently Asked Questions about Speech and Language Therapy

Q: What is speech therapy?

A: Speech and language therapists use a combination of goal-focused conversation and learning strategies, and a wide range of activities, to assist in the development of:

- foundation or pre-verbal skills, the building blocks of early language development, including appropriate use of eye contact, turn-taking, choice making, attention, and listening;
- non-verbal skills, and alternative and augmentative communication systems;
- functional, symbolic, and imaginative play skills;
- vocal ability through use of vocal play and reduction of jargon;
- voice and vocal health to support prosody, rate, phonation, and breathing patterns;
- articulation and phonology;
- oral strength and precision to support motor speech activity;
- eating and drinking skills as impacted by behavioral, physical, or physiological issues;
- receptive and expressive language skills, and verbal comprehension, including auditory memory and processing, word finding, vocabulary development, semantics, grammar, and sequencing;
- high-level language skills such as problem-solving, inferencing, and cognition;
- social and pragmatic skills for maintaining relationships with others;
- independence, confidence, and maturity.

Q: What happens during speech therapy sessions?

A: During speech therapy for children, therapists may:

- interact through talking and playing, and use books, pictures, and other objects as part of intervention to help stimulate language development;
- model correct sounds and syllables during age-appropriate play to teach the child how to make certain sounds;
- provide strategies for the home environment and homework for the child, as well as the parent or caregiver.

Q: My child does not have articulation issues, so what is the benefit of speech therapy?

A: The scope of practice for speech therapists is not limited to articulation. Speech therapists are professionals who practice in the areas of communication and swallowing. Communication includes speech production and fluency, verbal and nonverbal language, cognition, voice, resonance, and hearing. Swallowing includes all aspects of swallowing, including related feeding behaviors.

Q: If speech therapy services are recommended for my child, does that mean he/she has autism or another kind of disorder?

A: The answer depends on the nature and level of the child's challenges and struggles, and whether he/she has other co-existing challenges such as specific learning disorder (literacy or numeracy), attention deficit disorder, or autism spectrum disorder.

Q: How long does my child need to attend speech therapy for?

A: There is no single answer to this question because every child and family is different. We want children to finish therapy as quickly as they are able. We work with each child at their specific level and help them progress toward achieving their goals, which is a process that usually takes time.

We tend to recommend an end to therapy when the child:

- is performing at a predetermined level or within expected range;
- has reached all goals and objectives, is no longer considered to be at risk, and the initial concerning behavior has been eliminated;
- exhibits a plateau in progress toward goals and efforts made to modify the intervention plan have not led to notable gains (i.e. efforts made to change goals, procedures, activities, and strategies are not producing expected results).

Factors that affect how long a child attends therapy include:

- the child's specific challenges;
- severity of the challenges;
- presence of co-existing issues;
- frequency of therapy;
- independent practice outside therapy sessions;
- involvement by parents in the therapy process.

Q: What is the difference between tutors and speech therapists?

A: Tutors' role is typically to help students catch up when behind academically, rather than to remediate underlying foundation skills.

In contrast, speech therapists are professionally trained in selecting, implementing, adapting, and interpreting assessment tools and intervention methods to evaluate students' language, phonological awareness, reading, spelling, writing and social skills. All of these pieces are important when it comes to learning as a whole.

Speech therapists provide individual treatment programs with goals based on testing results and periodically assess students' progress toward those goals using standardized and informal testing measures. They also collaborate with teachers and tutors to implement strategies to help students cope with the school curriculum.