



A Parent's Guide to:

Speech Therapy in Schools

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1. Introduction

What Happens in Speech Therapy

What happens when your child visits a **speech-language pathologist** (SLP)? What exactly will the SLP do? There are questions that many parents ask when their child has been recommended to start a speech therapy program. In order for you to set your expectations (and your child's), here are the basics of what to expect from it. Of course, each course of therapy is tailored personally to your child's particular speech disorder, or speech impairment. However the following descriptions should serve as a general guideline to the entire process.

What is an SLP?

Speech-language pathologists work with people who cannot produce speech sounds or cannot produce them clearly; those with speech rhythm and fluency problems, such as articulation disorder or stuttering; people with voice disorders, such as inappropriate pitch or harsh voice; those with problems understanding and producing language; and those with

cognitive communication impairments, such as attention, memory and problem solving disorders. They also work with people who have swallowing and/or chewing difficulties.

What Happens In Speech Therapy?

When your child is entered into speech-language therapy, an SLP will work with him or her in a few different ways; one-on-one, in a small group, or directly in a classroom to overcome difficulties involved with a specific speech disorder. No two speech therapies are exactly alike. While treatment is specifically designed to treat each individual differently, expect your SLP to utilize a variety of strategies including any of the following:

- **Language activities:** These include playing and talking, using pictures, books, objects, or ongoing events to stimulate language development. The therapist may also model correct pronunciation and use repetition exercises to build speech and language skills.

- **Articulation therapy:** Articulation, or sound production, exercises involve having the therapist model correct sounds and syllables for your child, often during play activities. All exercises should be both age-appropriate and related to your child's specific therapy needs.
- **Oral-motor/feeding and swallowing therapy:** If chewing or swallowing is a challenge, you can expect your SLP to use a variety of oral exercises including various tongue, lip, and jaw exercises to help strengthen the muscles of the mouth. The SLP also may work with different food textures and temperatures to increase your child's oral awareness during eating and swallowing.
- **Recommendations and follow up expectations:** Your SLP will review his or her professional findings with you and will make recommendations for length and duration of speech therapy. If your SLP does not suggest homework, make sure to ask for tips, resources, and information about how to work with your child in between therapy sessions. Remember, as the parent, you are your child's best teacher and the more you can do to assist your SLP in providing consistent therapy activities, the more



The most important thing to remember about speech-language therapy is that early intervention is key! The earlier you can get your child started with speech therapy, the faster you both can achieve success!

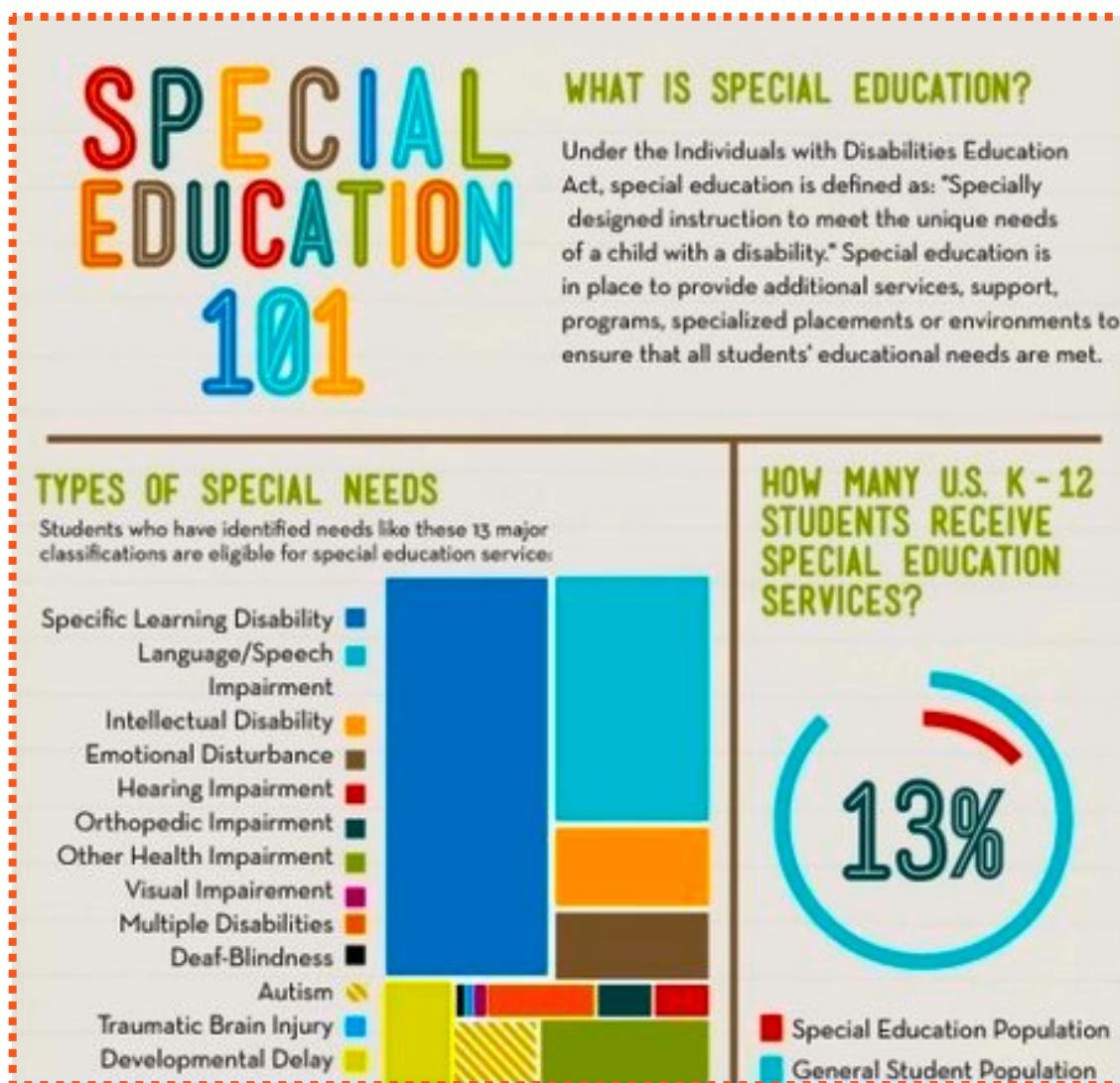
2. Therapy In Schools

What can we Expect from Schools?

Your child is starting speech therapy in school. But what exactly does this mean? The type of services your child will receive in school will depend on many factors. These include your child's age, the type of speech disorder that has been

diagnosed, other learning delays or disabilities, the structure of your child's school, and more. The two basic forms of speech therapy in schools include in-class (sometimes referred to as push-in services) and separate

services (sometimes also known as pull-out services). There are also other forms of assistance that speech-language pathologists can offer to your child.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE!
13% OF THE GENERAL STUDENT POPULATION RECEIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES
Image Courtesy of scoop.it

The First Step for Speech Therapy: Initial Assessment

Speech-language pathologists are trained to assess communication abilities of patients. SLPs can work with recommendations by physicians and listen to the concerns of teachers and parents to determine the needs of the child. Assessments take on many forms (even electronic) based on severity of symptoms, age, and other factors. Once these assessments are complete a plan, which often includes an **Individualized Education Program** (IEP), can be implemented for your child. The IEP is a treatment plan for your child's speech disorder. It is specially tailored to meet your child's needs. An IEP is implemented within the public school system in accordance with the **Individuals with**

The Second Step: Individualized Education Program

While IEPs are not exactly rocket science, navigating the process may sometimes be frustrating. You'll likely have a great deal of paperwork to review.

1. Referral for an IEP

The first step in getting help for your child with an IEP is getting a referral. Your child's teacher or doctor may refer him/her for an evaluation or you could call the school and request one. A referral for an IEP does not necessarily mean that your child has a speech disorder as defined by the IDEA law, but it sets the process in motion.

2. Evaluation

The evaluation for an IEP is a

little different than an initial assessment by a speech-language pathologist. This evaluation involves the assessments of the SLP and other professionals, which may include a psychologist, social worker, physical therapist, occupational therapist, and a special educator.

Sign the permission form to start the evaluation process. The interdisciplinary team will likely meet with you and your child. They may observe your child in the classroom and review his/her homework. They may conduct additional tests, such



as evaluations of his reading skills and language development. The team will then compile their findings into a **comprehensive evaluation report** (CER).

3. IEP Meeting

After your child is evaluated for a possible speech disorder, you will receive a notice for the IEP meeting. You may request a copy of the CER before this meeting. You may also request a separate meeting prior to the IEP meeting to discuss the CER. This can be useful to help you prepare for the IEP meeting. At the IEP meeting, your child's eligibility for help under the IDEA law will be determined.

4. Developing the IEP

If your child is found to have a qualifying speech disorder, the next step is the development of the IEP. This is a written document that details your child's needs and the support services he will receive within the school. It also describes the specific goals for your child's progress. Take an active role in developing the IEP with the interdisciplinary team; you are your child's best advocate. Ask any questions that you have. Do not hesitate to voice your concerns; if you disagree with any part of the IEP, say so. For example, the IEP may state that your child will have access to two 1-hour speech therapy sessions per week. If you want him to have access to additional speech therapy help, negotiate for three or four sessions.

5. Reviewing the IEP

Your child's IEP will be reviewed once per year, if not more often. If you feel that your child's IEP is not serving his best interests, you can request a review at any time. The school may also request a review. During the review, the IEP may be revised. About every three years, your child will be reevaluated. An interdisciplinary team will determine if your child continues to be eligible for help under the IDEA law.



How to Prepare Yourself For the IEP Meeting

The IEP meeting will be an exhaustive review of your child's speech and language issues and possibly his related behavioral problems. As your child's advocate, be prepared to address any of these issues. Request a copy of the comprehensive evaluation report (CER), which is a record of the findings of the team members, and review it thoroughly before the meeting. You may request a meeting to discuss the CER prior to the IEP meeting. Before the IEP meeting, read the IDEA regulations and know your child's rights. Talk to other parents with children in speech therapy in the school and ask them about the services that they receive.

What to Bring...

Before the IEP meeting, write down a list of all of the questions you have and any points that you wish to discuss. Bring this list to the meeting, along with your copy of the CER, a copy of the IDEA regulations, and all other paperwork that you have received from the school. Bring all written assessments from any private speech therapists that may have evaluated your child. Bring your child's medical records, samples of his schoolwork, and any audio or video clips of him that may highlight his speech disorder.

Parents often find that bringing along a tape recorder is useful. An IEP meeting is often lengthy and exhausting; having a record of the conversation can be helpful. Ask other advocates for your child to attend the meeting. You have the right to bring a family member or even a close friend who can provide moral support during heated discussions. You may also bring a private speech therapist to represent your child's needs and a legal advocate, such as an attorney who is familiar with the IDEA law. Check with the National Disability Rights Network and the Yellow Pages for Kids with Disabilities for listings of advocates. Inform the school ahead of time about any additional participants.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): Is a treatment plan specially tailored to meet your child's needs. The IEP is implemented within the public school system in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Is a law intended to ensure that all children with a qualifying disability have access to a free, appropriate public education.

Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER): This report shows your child's results to several assessments; it helps the Special Education Department decide whether or not your child qualifies for an IEP

What To Say...

Listen to each team member carefully and take plenty of notes to refer to during the meeting – bring a tape recorder if you want! If you feel that a team member is rushing through a particular topic, do not hesitate to ask her for clarification. Ask all of the questions that you have. Feel free to disagree with the opinions of the evaluators. They may be professionals in the speech therapy and education fields, but you know your child best. Make sure you get all your doubts clarified, this is your chance!

Do not be afraid to disagree. You know your child best!

What's Next?

Once you and the team develop the IEP, you will be asked to sign it if you agree with it. Even if you agree with the team's recommendations, never sign the IEP immediately. Bring it home and read it several times. Bring it to your child's private speech therapist, his doctor, and any other professional who has evaluated him. Discuss whether it really meets the needs of your child. Sign the document when you feel completely comfortable with the entire treatment plan.



Make S.M.A.R.T Speech Therapy Goals

Have you ever heard of the phrase if you fail to plan, you plan to fail? The S.M.A.R.T. goal planning model helps you make sure that you are planning for success. While the model is often used in business planning, it is a very beneficial guideline for kids and has been successfully used by many special education teachers and SLPs. You can help your child apply this approach for speech therapy, or even academic homework, too. The S.M.A.R.T therapy goals stand for:

S – Specific – Work with your child’s SLP to establish very specific goals. The general goal of “improve articulation” can seem overwhelming and unobtainable for kids. The more specific the goal the greater the likelihood that your child will feel empowered and capable. If you’re stuck on how to make the goals specific, work with your child to answer the basic questions of:

Who? (child, child w/parent, or child/SLP combo)
 What? (specific goal)
 When? (days/times during week)
 Where? (at SLP’s office, in home, on the go)
 How? (any extra tools/supplies needed)

M – Measurable – Look for measurable ways your child can work on speech therapy goals. This might mean playing 2 vocabulary games, completing 3 worksheets, or attending a month of therapy appointments.

A – Achievable – Some speech disorders are more difficult to treat than others and the goals for your child should be achievable based on his or her specific challenges. Make sure your child has the resources needed to make the goals achievable, both in time and in tangible supplies. Help your child navigate any obstacles that might otherwise prevent him from tackling the goal.

R – Realistic – Make sure that the steps needed to reach the goal are healthy, logical, and in line with the overall objectives of the SLP. A goal of “no stuttering by end of summer” for a child who is just beginning speech therapy for stuttering is not only unlikely to happen so swiftly (if at all), but it can create an unhealthy self-image for the child. A better goal would be “improve pacing of speech during class presentations” because it is specific and uses positive language.

T – Timely – Make sure to incorporate time-related markers for the goals. Time is tangible, measurable, and specific. Some examples of these might be:

Work on speech therapy flashcards for 15 minutes 4 days a week
 Improve articulation when reading the /r/ sounds book in 3 weeks

Types of Speech Services: Push-In vs. Pull-Out

Push-In Services

There are services that can be provided to children in the classroom by an SLP or a speech/language classroom aide or paraprofessional under guidance of an SLP. This allows your child to continue to benefit from the whole-classroom experience while still improving communication skills. Depending on the reasons for the services, push-in therapies can include:

- Working with your child to use appropriate volume control during classroom discussions
- Working with your child to interact and communicate appropriately during question/answer sessions in class
- Observing your child communicating in classroom setting
- Helping your child develop graphic organizers to keep track of classroom expectations/homework
- Paraphrasing and reviewing information for your child if he or she is struggling with communication intake
- Observing your child's vocabulary comprehension in the classroom and assisting with various tools for building vocabulary
- Working with your child to minimize stress during classroom speaking situation (i.e. when stuttering is an issue using calming techniques before giving a book report)

There are many other ways that an SLP can support your child in the classroom, but one of the biggest benefits (besides maintaining classroom connections for your child), is that your child's teacher also becomes more aware of the tools the SLP is using with your child to target specific communication needs. A side benefit is that other students in the classroom also learn from these strategies and tools provided by the SLP.



Pull-Out Services



There are circumstances when a child's speech disorder is either perhaps so severe or is accompanied by other disorders or multiple symptoms that it makes pull-out services more appropriate. If this is determined to be best for your child, he or she will receive therapy in individual or small group settings during the school day in a separate classroom setting.

There will be more intensive techniques and tools taught and provided to your child. Sometimes pull-out services are utilized for kids who:

- Have disabilities such as autism or cerebral palsy that lead them to have other pull-out services
- Need speech therapy for swallowing disorders
- Benefit from learning vocal hygiene techniques
- Have multiple impairments, such as hearing and vision loss
- Are learning to use technology, such as apps, for supplemental outside therapies
- Are learning to use assistive devices



Sometimes a combination of approaches will be used that will maximize the therapy environment for your child. You can work with your child's teachers, SLPs, and school administration to assess homework needs and challenges and put together an IEP that will work for your child's speech therapy in school.

3. Collaboration

Parent-Therapist Relationship

Speech therapy is an exercise in successful collaboration. Not just between the SLP and the child, but between parents and SLPs, SLPs and teachers, SLPs and doctors or SLPs and other professionals. How many times have you ever done a job and wished you had some help? Be it cleaning up a room, filing your taxes or cooking a meal. Chances are, you wished you had some help for several reasons. Teamwork often gets the job

done faster, makes the work easier, and helps you problem solve challenges. Effective and successful speech therapy requires the team approach with parents especially to promote generalization, enhance learning and ultimately achieve goals sooner.

Speech therapists may have different interactions with parents based on the setting in which they are treating a

child. Early intervention settings, however, take place in the home already and are based on principles of collaboration between families and therapists. School-based SLPs may have few interactions with parents while those in private practice see them often. Regardless of the setting, consistent communication and interaction between all parties will ensure greater success than not.



Successful Collaboration Strategies

Here are some strategies for successful collaboration between parents and speech language therapists.

Observation:

Parents who have the opportunity to observe speech therapy sessions should always do so. This does not entail an entire session, perhaps just a few minutes, to allow the therapist to model specific techniques in action. Often, therapists update parents on session progress, but have limited time to explain all of the tips and tricks after a session. Parents should not be shy about asking to be involved, observe or even participate in a session.

Homework:

In order to generalize skills, children need consistent carryover at home and in other environments. To ensure carryover, parents should ask and speech therapists should give “homework.” Homework doesn’t have to be checked or graded, but ensures that specific exercises or techniques aren’t forgotten outside of therapy. The goal is not to make a chore but to empower parents to be confident models and teachers of language. It also provides more opportunities for the child to practice vocabulary that might

not naturally occur in the speech therapy setting (like grandma or bike riding). If both parties are not active in giving, accepting and doing homework, progress will be quite challenging for the child. Speech therapists sending homework should particularly provide parents with carryover ideas that are related to home (like mealtime games or car activities) or after school activities. If techniques are difficult to explain, try filming and sending a quick video home of how to use that technique.

Connect all team members:

In the world of pediatric therapy, it is not uncommon to see children who are receiving services from multiple providers. Connecting these providers via email or otherwise is a great way to get the wheels of communication going.

Sharing Information:

SLPs and parents must share information about not only techniques but progress or concerns. Parents should also share information with an SLP about upcoming events that are important to the child’s life, any life changes or language targets that are important to them. If the family just added a new baby to the family, that baby’s name

would be pretty important to communicate and might be a good speech therapy target. Creating a communication notebook is the easiest way to share information. This is a notebook that both SLPs and

caregivers can write in daily and send between environments. It can include updates on progress or ideas for home carryover. Another easy way to share information is to film and send short

video clips. This can be on a child's iPad (if they use one) or emailed to a parent quickly from a smartphone to update them on progress.

Top 5 Questions to Ask the SLP to Increase Collaboration

1. What's the Best Way to Stay in Contact With You?

This question seems like a no-brainer. After all, your home address and phone numbers are in your child's file, right? But asking your child's SLP how you can best keep in touch with her does a couple of things. First, it lets the SLP know that you are keenly interested in remaining involved and up-to-date with your child's speech therapy sessions. The question speaks to your interest in collaboration with the SLP.

And secondly, since your child will be receiving therapy in school, you will not be able to talk to the SLP very often. You could offer to exchange email addresses for updates. Some school SLPs send the children home with a folder, which is updated regularly with notes on progress, areas that need work, and homework assignments.

2. How Do You Integrate Speech Therapy Into the Classroom?

This question also speaks to collaboration. School speech therapists often collaborate with the teacher to find out what the kids are working on in the classroom. They can then use that material to make the speech therapy more relevant. However, with a private SLP, this might be a little trickier. Your child's speech therapist might be willing to meet with his new teacher to discuss his needs. Otherwise, you can show your child's classwork and assignments to his speech therapist. In this case, it can be helpful to have notes from the teacher regarding which areas your child struggles with in the classroom. For example, the teacher might notice that Jake has trouble following verbal instructions.



3. Is My Child Advancing Toward His IEP Goals?

This is a great question to ask on a regular basis. Your child's IEP goals should be specific and measurable. For example, Jake's IEP might state that he should be able to pronounce the "f" sound in the medial position within three months. If Jake is still struggling with this after the three months are up, it may be time to review his IEP and perhaps revise it. On the other hand, if Jake has aced the "f" sound in the medial position, he's ready to move on to new challenges. Asking your child's SLP this question helps you to better monitor his progress.

4. What Activities Will You Use This Year?

Speech therapists use a wealth of games, toys, and activities to encourage learning. It would be practically impossible for your child's SLP to list all of the activities she might use throughout the year, but it's a good idea to get a general sense of what your child will be doing. This will enable you to more effectively coach him through his speech therapy homework. You can also inform the SLP of your child's favorite activities, games, etc., in order to encourage his engagement in speech therapy.

Do not be afraid to make your questions the focal point for your conversation with the SLP

5. How Can I Help My Child At Home?

This is one of the most important questions you can ask your child's speech therapist. There is no one-size-fits-all answer. It depends on your child's specific needs, strengths, and trouble areas. The speech therapist can share with you the techniques that appear to be effective for your child. Working with him at home will help to accelerate his progress. She might also have ideas for apps for speech therapy, helpful books, and tools such as Speech Buddies, which you can use with your child at home.





Making Summer Plans: Continuing Speech Therapy

School may be out soon, but speech therapy does not have to end. Instead of lamenting the (temporary) loss of your child's school SLP, use summer break as an opportunity to advance your child's communication skills. If your child qualifies for **extended school year** (ESY) services, he will still be able to work with his school SLP. There are also plenty of other opportunities to turn fun activities into learning experiences.

Summer Camps

ESY services and private SLPs are only two options for structured speech therapy during the summer. Consider signing your child up for a summer camp that is specifically intended to help children with speech disorders and other special needs. Google "speech therapy summer camps" and you will see a whole host of programs in your area.

If you have trouble finding a summer camp or other programs, talk to the school's representatives about local programs. Contact local universities to determine if they plan to offer any summer camps

for special needs children. If you still strike out, network with other parents at your child's school or in your speech therapy support group. Determine if there is an interest in getting the kids together to work on social interactions and communication. Perhaps all the parents could chip in and hire a private SLP to work with a small group of children.

Speech Therapy Gift Bags

Kids are always excited about getting gifts. Put together a gift bag that contains a few items that can help encourage your child's communication skills this summer. You can toss in a couple of workbooks that are related to the areas of speech and language that your child needs to improve, such as vocabulary workbooks. Tell your child that he will receive a gold sticker for each completed page in the workbook. Five gold stickers could mean a small toy. Additional gift bag ideas could include a tape recorder (to encourage vocalization), a new speech therapy computer program, or a CD of sing-along songs.

At Home Speech Therapy Ideas

Children often would like to do nothing more during the summer than watch TV, play videogames, or hang out with their friends. Start speech therapy activities early in the summer break so that your child becomes accustomed to them. Set up a daily or weekly routine. For example, every evening right before bed, read a book with your child. Encourage your child to read along with you. If he cannot read yet, he could make up stories about the pictures. Every Saturday morning, you could take a walk with your child. During your walk, work on the areas of speech and language that your child needs to improve. If he needs to work on his “b” sounds, for example, point out birds, bees, and benches (as in park benches) on your walk. Encourage your child to repeat the words.

Break up the more traditional speech therapy activities into smaller chunks so that your child is less likely to resist them. For example, get into the habit of using Speech Buddies for articulation right after your child brushes his teeth every morning. Then, after lunch, you could work on flashcards with your child for 10 minutes. Afterward, reward him for successfully completing his flashcards with a quick game of ball outside.

