

# Speech-Language Therapy

What is a Speech-Language Therapist?

A Speech-Language Therapist (SLT) is a professional trained to assess, diagnose and treat speech, language and swallowing disorders in people of all ages.

A SLT evaluates and treats children and adults who have difficulty speaking, listening, reading, writing, interacting and swallowing. The overall goal of Speech-Language Therapy is to optimize the individual's ability to communicate, thereby improving their quality of life. With regard to children, a SLT will generally target milestones that are delayed, and work to find fun activities to strengthen the child in areas of weakness.

What kind of conditions does a SLT treat in children?

Children require Speech-Language Therapy for numerous reasons. These include:

- Motor-planning difficulties
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Hearing impairments
- Language delays
- Reading and Spelling difficulties
- Down's Syndrome
- Pronunciation difficulties
- Cognitive delays
- Feeding and swallowing disorders
- Weak oral muscles
- Excessive hoarseness of voice
- Cleft, lip and palate
- Stuttering

What is the role of a SLT in treating children with Autism Spectrum Disorders?

The SLT targets the following goals in therapy sessions:

- Initiation of spontaneous communication
- Comprehension of verbal and nonverbal communication
- Communication for a range of social functions that promote the development of friendships (Social skill development).
- Verbal and nonverbal means of communication (including gestures, speech, signs, pictures, written words, functional alternatives to challenging behaviours and alternative communication systems)
- Access to literacy and academic instruction and extracurricular activities.
- Improving existing receptive (understanding) and expressive (speaking) language abilities

My child is non-verbal. Should we still see a SLT?

YES! The SLT can either promote verbal communication or find alternative means of communication that are best suited to your child.

Remember, communication does not only occur through speaking. It can be non-verbal as well.

Does my child need to be a certain age to start with Speech-Language Therapy?

**NO!** Speech-Language Therapy does not have age restrictions. A person is never too young or too old to start seeing a SLT.

A lot of communication skills develop before a child develops language. A SLT can target these areas as well. It is advisable to start as soon as possible. Children's brains learn faster when they are younger. However, a person's brain can still form new connections later in life, so it is never too late to start!

What are some ways that my non-verbal child can communicate?

In some cases, verbal communication is not a realistic goal. This does not mean that the child can't learn to communicate.

- A SLT can teach your child to exchange or point to pictures to express themselves.
- Children can learn to use devices that have a voice output system. For example, the child points at a picture and the device speaks for them.
- Many children are candidates for using gestures to communicate.
- Any form of communication that allows a child to express their wants, needs, and feelings can be very beneficial. It also often reduces frustration and related behaviour difficulties.

How do I find a  
Speech-  
Language  
Therapist?

Speak to your child's teacher or principal about recommending a SLT best suited to your child's needs.

Alternatively, you can contact your local hospital or university to seek advice.

The internet has numerous listings for health care professionals as well.

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#### References:

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