

What is Speech Pathology?



Speech pathologists study, diagnose and treat communication disorders, including difficulties with speech, language, stuttering and voice difficulties.

They work with people who have difficulty communicating. This may include difficulties related to developmental delays, stroke, brain injuries, learning difficulties, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, and hearing loss, as well as other problems that can affect speech and language. People who experience difficulties swallowing food and drink safely can also be helped by a speech pathologist.

For children, Speech Pathologists can help with the following areas of communication:

Speech: the actual sounds we produce to say words clearly so other people can understand us.

Language: the words we use to express our ideas and thoughts. This includes vocabulary, grammar, understanding and story-telling.

Stuttering: how smoothly or fluently a person talks.

Hearing: children with hearing loss are at risk of speech and language difficulties, so regular monitoring of their skills by a speech pathologist is recommended.

Early literacy skills: the underlying foundational skills needed to learn to read and spell effectively eg. counting syllables, knowing sounds and letters, blending sounds together into words, knowing vowel sounds and spellings

Feeding skills: where a child experiences difficulties in chewing, biting or swallowing food/drink, or difficulties with lumpy foods, certain textures, or is a fussy eater.

Social skills: how a child interacts with other people

If you're concerned about your child's development in any of the above areas, contact a speech pathologist to discuss whether assessment for your child is indicated.

Where can I find a Speech Pathologist?

Speech pathologists can work in a number of settings including private clinics, in schools, hospitals and community health settings.

There are various funding options available that you may be able to access if your child does need to see a speech pathologist privately:

- *Private health insurance*
Contact your private health insurer to see if you are eligible for any rebates as each health provider has different rebates depending on your level of cover.

- *Enhanced Primary Care plan*
This is a Medicare funded scheme that provides rebates for five allied health sessions each calendar year. Speak to your GP to see if your child may be eligible.

- *BetterStart Initiative or Helping Children with Autism package*
This is a federal government initiative whereby children 0-7 years with certain diagnoses are eligible for funding packages to support access to private therapy.

Training: Speech pathologists can also provide support and training to teachers/educators to help children learn language and early literacy skills to their best potential at daycare or kindy.



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