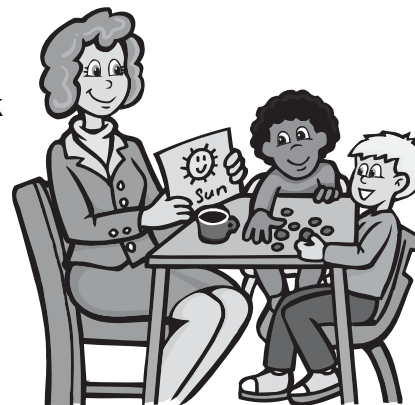


## What Is a Speech-Language Pathologist?

By Susie S. Loraine, M.A., CCC-SLP

A *speech-language pathologist* (SLP) is a highly-trained professional who evaluates and treats children and adults who have difficulty with speech or language. Although people often think of speech and language as the same thing, the terms actually have very different meanings. If your child has trouble with *speech*, he/she struggles with the “how-to” of talking—the coordination of the muscles and movements necessary to produce speech. If your child has trouble with *language*, he/she struggles with understanding what he/she hears or sees. Your child may struggle to find the right words and/or organize those words in a meaningful way to communicate a message or hold a conversation.



An SLP also evaluates and treats children and adults who have difficulty swallowing food or liquid. An SLP will help identify what part of the *swallowing process* is making it difficult for your child to eat (e.g., chewing, manipulating food with the tongue, coordinating mouth and throat structures and muscles, breathing appropriately while eating).

### What Do SLPs Treat?

Below is a list of common speech and language disorders with a brief explanation of each.

#### Speech Disorders

- *Articulation* - the way we say our speech sounds
- *Phonology* - the speech patterns we use
- *Apraxia* - difficulty planning and coordinating the movements needed to make speech sounds
- *Fluency* - stuttering
- *Voice* - problems with the way the voice sounds, such as hoarseness

#### Language Disorders

- *Receptive Language* - difficulty understanding language
- *Expressive Language* - difficulty using language
- *Pragmatic Language* - social communication; the way we speak to each other

#### Other Disorders

- *Deafness/Hearing Loss* - loss of hearing; therapy includes developing lip-reading, speech, and/or alternative communication systems
- *Oral-Motor Disorders* - weak tongue and/or lip muscles
- *Swallowing/Feeding Disorders* - difficulty chewing and/or swallowing

## Where Do SLPs Work?

You can find SLPs in many different settings including schools, private clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, and public health agencies. In addition to these more common settings, you will find SLPs at universities, state and federal government agencies, health departments, and research laboratories. Some SLPs specialize in working with children, some with adults. If you suspect your child has problems with speech, language, and/or swallowing, you will need to choose the setting that will be most appropriate for your child.

## How Do I Find an SLP?

If you are looking for an SLP for your child, it is important to locate a **certified pediatric speech-language pathologist**. The term *certified* means that the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has given the SLP a Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) stating that he/she is skilled in providing therapy for speech and language disorders. You will know the SLP is certified if you see CCC in his/her credentials. *Pediatric* means the SLP specializes in working with children—this is important because testing techniques and treatment techniques are different for children and adults.

There are several ways to find an SLP if you are concerned about your child's communication skills. Your school/school district should have a certified SLP that can observe and/or test your child for speech and language difficulties. Your local children's hospital will also have certified SLPs on staff. You will find them in departments such as: Department of Hearing and Speech, Clinic for Communication Disorders, or Developmental Clinic. Your family practitioner can also recommend an SLP. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) provides a search engine to help you find a local, certified SLP in your area: <http://www.asha.org/findpro/>

## What Should I Expect at My Child's First Appointment?

The first visit to an SLP includes an *evaluation*. This evaluation typically consists of two or more *standardized tests*—tests that give the SLP the ability to compare your child's skills to children of the same age. The SLP will ask you questions about your child's medical and developmental history. Be prepared to share information about your child's *communication milestones*. For example, you should know when your child said his/her first words, what kinds of gestures he/she uses to communicate, whether he/she likes to communicate socially or solely when he/she wants something, etc. Refer to Handy Handout® #69, *Speech-Language-Hearing Case History Form* ([http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/69\\_Speechcase\\_bk.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/69_Speechcase_bk.pdf)), to help you brainstorm and organize the information an SLP may ask you as part of your child's medical and developmental history. Research shows that early intervention for children with speech/language problems can result in less time in therapy.



### SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING CASE HISTORY FORM



#### Identifying and Family Information:

Child's Name: _____	Birthdate: _____	Sex: <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> F
Father's Name: _____	Daytime Phone: _____	
Address: _____	Cell Phone: _____	
_____	E-mail: _____	
Mother's Name: _____	Daytime Phone: _____	
Address: _____	Cell Phone: _____	
_____	E-mail: _____	
Doctor's Name: _____	Doctor's Phone: _____	

## What Questions Should I Ask the SLP?

The SLP will ask you questions about your child's history during the evaluation. There are questions you may want to ask the SLP before and/or during your child's appointment.

### Prior to the Appointment

- What age group do you work with?
- What age and specific area (autism, fluency, deafness, early intervention, etc.) are your specialties?
- How quickly can you see my child, and what are methods of payment/funding?
- After the evaluation, is there a waiting list for treatment?
- Are you certified (have your CCCs) and licensed by the state?

### During the Appointment

- How can my child's speech/language skills be compared to other children? How common/uncommon is my child's disorder/delay?
- How frequently will he/she need therapy? How did you make this decision?
- Can I take an active role in the therapy sessions? Can I observe each therapy session?
- How will this affect my child's education?
- How will you check my child's progress in therapy?
- Where can I get resources to learn more about my child's difficulties? What can I do to help my child with his/her difficulties?
- What will occur during therapy?

## Other Helpful Handy Handouts®

HH #64 Online Resources for Parents & Professionals (<http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/64OnlineResources.pdf>)

HH #72 What to Expect at a Feeding Evaluation ([http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/72\\_what.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/72_what.pdf))

HH #98 Articulation: When Should I Worry If My Child is Behind? ([http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/98\\_ArticDevelopment.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/98_ArticDevelopment.pdf))

HH #99 What You Need to Know About Your Child's Speech/Language Evaluation at School ([http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/99\\_SchoolSpeechLangEval.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/99_SchoolSpeechLangEval.pdf))

HH #120 Promoting Oral Language Development in Young Children ([http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/120\\_oral\\_language\\_development.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/120_oral_language_development.pdf))

HH #122 Oral-Motor Developmental Milestones ([http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/122\\_OralMotorDevelopmentalMilestones.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdfs/122_OralMotorDevelopmentalMilestones.pdf))