

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SPEECH PATHOLOGY

As a practicing speech language pathologist for many years I have been asked some questions repeatedly. I thought writing these questions and answers in an article such as this may prove to be helpful. Should you have any additional questions, visit my Web site www.Robinbest.com, e-mail your questions to Robin@robinbest.com or call 954-345-3799.

By Robin Best, M.A.,C.C.C.,P.A.

Q: What does a speech language pathologist do?

A: A speech language pathologist is a licensed and certified professional that corrects communication disorders. This can range from hearing disorders, articulation deficits, auditory/language processing difficulties, vocal disturbances, neurological dysfunction, fluency issues such as stuttering, feeding and swallowing concerns, as well as oral motor issues. There are also times people will seek speech therapy to help with speech improvement issues such as rate, volume, and accent reduction.

Q: What is the difference between a speech language pathologist, a speech pathologist, a speech therapist, a speech clinician, and a speech teacher?

A: They are all synonymous terms and should be equally licensed and certified. The term speech teacher is usually used in a school--their qualifications may be different based on the school's criteria for the position.

Q: How long does speech therapy take?

A: Speech therapy can vary from a short duration for something like an isolated tongue thrust or reverse swallow to a lengthy period of time for people that are deaf or have Down syndrome, autism, or cerebral palsy. Each case needs to be looked at individually and discussed with the professionals and family members within the context of the remediation process.

Q: What is a speech language screening, a speech language assessment and a speech language evaluation?

A: A speech and language screening is a quick look to determine whether or not further testing is indicated. It can take five to 10 minutes. A standardized instrument may be used but it may not be if the age or concerns are answered via observation. A diagnostic evaluation or assessment is a complete battery of standardized tests administered to qualify and quantify performance and skills for baseline data and to determine an effective treatment program.

Q: Will my child grow out of his speech problem?

A: The best answer to this question is to speak with a speech language pathologist directly regarding the specific areas of concern. It may be necessary for the clinician to schedule an appointment.

Q: When should I start speech therapy?

A: Early intervention is essential to reaching optimal progress in the shortest period of time. There are services such as CHILD FIND and EARLY STEPS and other government funded programs because identifying and treating speech, language and other developmental delays early lead to a better prognosis.

Q: What is the difference between receiving speech therapy at home, in school or preschool or in a private therapy clinic?

A: It is very tempting to want to receive speech therapy in your child's preschool. It is so convenient. Having a professional come to your home can be very easy as well for the parent that has multiple children and has so much going on. However, as someone that has provided therapy in people's homes and at preschools, it is usually not the best way to do therapy.

In the preschool environment the clinician isn't in total control of the activity level surrounding her. There is also an absence of interaction with the parents. While it is helpful to have the teachers and school personnel involved, it is more helpful to be working directly with the parent to reinforce skills learned and be active participant in the treatment.

Regarding home therapy, it is also a setting where the speech therapist isn't in control of the environment. Phones are ringing, dogs barking and doorbells blaring. The toys are the child's not the clinician's, which can put the professional at a disadvantage depending on the type of remediation being offered. There is also a socialization factor lacking as compared to going to a center. In addition, more sophisticated materials and programs more familiar to the professional can be offered at a clinic.

Q: What do the letters (M.A.,C.C.C.,P.A.) after your name mean?

A: M.A. is an abbreviation for master of arts. M.S. is an abbreviation for master of sciences. Both graduate degrees have been used for students of Communication Disorders depending on the university attended and the year.

C.C.C. is an abbreviation for Certificate of Clinical Competence. Speech pathologists that have passed a national exam and did a clinical fellowship year with proper accreditation from the American Speech Language and Hearing Association will have those letters after their name.

P.A. is an abbreviation for being part of a corporation.

All speech language pathologist should be licensed and certified to practice in the state they are residing.

Q: Did I do something wrong parenting my child to cause my child's speech difficulties?

A: Absolutely not. Parents do not cause speech and language disorders. However, there are things parents can do to exasperate or ameliorate areas of difficulty.

Q: How do I explain to my child why they are going to see you?

A: It is not uncommon for children to receive speech therapy. Many children, especially when they are young, don't feel the stigma at all. This is yet another reason to embrace the idea of early intervention. If there are other family members or friends that go to speech therapy they may be helpful in talking to your child about it. However, I suggest to parents (depending on the age of the youngster) to say that you are going to play talking games with Miss XXX or you are going to work with Miss XXX so she can help you to say your words and thoughts more clearly. Obviously the wording can change based on the objectives set for therapy.

Q: Will my child's speech or language delay cause difficulties with academics or social interactions:

A: There is definitely the possibility that impairment in the speech and language areas can have a detrimental effect on academics and social interactions. It is also known to have a very negative impact on self-esteem. These are all factors that can be addressed with treatment.

Q: Will insurance help pay for speech therapy?

A: Health insurance may sometimes cover speech and language therapy. There are variations in coverage based on carriers, individual's policy and diagnosis. Be aware of restrictions, deductibles and co-payments.