



FAQs from the general public

Choosing a private speech pathologist

Speech Pathology Australia often receives queries from members of the general public wishing to obtain advice about how to choose a speech pathologist. This is not as easy as it sounds as each consumer is an individual and their needs will vary from others. This information sheet does, however, aim to provide some general information and a range of questions that consumers can ask a speech pathologist when they contact them to arrange an appointment.

SPA staff are unable to recommend an individual speech pathologist. For more information about speech pathologists and speech pathology refer to Speech Pathology Services and [SPA's Fact Sheets](#) in particular – [What is a speech pathologist?](#)

Do I need a referral?

Generally, you do not need a referral to see a speech pathologist. You might need a referral from a GP or paediatrician if you would like to access funding sources e.g. Helping Children with Autism, Chronic Disease management program.

What do you charge?

Speech pathologists can determine their own fee schedule. When determining a fee schedule, speech pathologists may base their fees on factors such as their costs to run the business, experience etc. Speech Pathology Australia does not have a recommended schedule of fees for speech pathologists. Speech pathologists may charge different fees for a range of services including assessment, therapy (individual or group), attendance at meetings, tele-health consultations, report writing, travel, presentations, non-attendance at a session, provision of materials, additional administrative tasks etc.

Are there any rebates or funded programs that can assist with the cost of speech pathology fees?

See SPA's information on [Fees, Rebates and Funded programs](#)

Are you a member of Speech Pathology Australia (SPA)?

Membership of Speech Pathology Australia is the only way of ensuring that the speech pathologist has:

- obtained the appropriate qualifications (the speech pathologist must have completed an approved Australian speech pathology course, or undertake SPA's overseas qualifications assessment process if they obtained their SP qualification overseas), and
- recency of practice (they must have worked 1000 hours over the past five years).

As of the start of 2016, all speech pathologists who are members of SPA will be Certified Practicing Speech Pathologists. This will ensure that members take part in the Professional Self Regulation program which demonstrates a commitment to ongoing professional development. For more information see [SPA's PSR flyer: Information for the public](#)

Please note: speech pathologists do not currently need to be registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

Can speech pathologists advertise their services?

Speech pathologists can advertise but must ensure that any advertising produced is accurate, based on evidence and does not misrepresent the profession. Speech pathologists cannot use testimonials in their advertising and must provide detailed information about terms and conditions associated with discounts, gifts, prizes and other inducements.

What will you do to protect my privacy?

Privacy of personal information is a legal requirement. Your speech pathologist should provide you with access to a copy of their Privacy Policy.

Where will I see you?

Some speech pathologists work from home, others work out of premises and some provide a mobile service. Some are employed by schools or other facilities (e.g., private hospital or residential aged care facility) to provide a service in that facility.

How often will you see me? How long do you think I will have to attend speech therapy for? How will we decide when we need to stop coming to speech therapy?

The frequency of therapy will depend on the presenting difficulty and the speech pathologist may not be able to answer this question until they have completed an assessment. They may, however, be able to give you a general idea as to how frequently clients with your difficulty usually attend therapy and for how long. Discontinuation of therapy depends on a client's progress and this may be difficult to predict prior to commencing therapy.

What age group do you usually work with?

Speech pathologists work with people of all ages, however, they may have a special interest in working with a particular age group.

Have you worked with people with my difficulties before?

Speech pathologists graduate with generalist knowledge in the areas of speech, language and swallowing and are able to work with many different people with different communication challenges. As speech pathologists gather experience they may develop an area of special interest in a particular field or they may continue to provide a generalist service. Speech pathologist may also work with a particular age group of clients (e.g. infants, aged care) or continue to work with the general population. It is best to talk to the speech pathologist directly about you or your child's difficulties and they can let you know about the work they have done with other clients with a similar background and how they can help you.

How long have you worked with people with my difficulties?

This may be particularly relevant if the difficulties you are experiencing are complex or require advanced skills, however, a newer graduate who is well supported in their work environment will be able to work with a wide variety of clients.

How much of your caseload is made up of treating people with my difficulties?

Once again this may be relevant if the difficulties you or your child are experiencing are complex or require advanced skills.

Do you have any extra qualifications or training that will assist you to work with me?

Sometimes speech pathologists complete additional studies or training. For example: The [Hanen Programs](#) for children with language delay/disorder or Autism Spectrum Disorder, the [Lidcombe Program](#) for children who stutter or training in the use of Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES).

What will happen in the first session?

Generally, speech pathologists may talk to you about your concerns regarding you or your child's communication and/or swallowing difficulties. They will take case history information and may start an assessment. In some instances, speech pathologist may also observe you or your child in different settings e.g. classroom, mealtime. The assessment process should be clearly outlined to you prior to the commencement.

Why do you need to carry out an assessment?

With your consent, speech pathologists carry out an assessment to gain more information about your or your child's communication and/or swallowing skills. This will assist with the formal diagnosis of an area of difficulty (e.g. speech, language, literacy, voice, stuttering etc.) and will assist in the development of therapy goals. For more information see [SPA's information sheet: Speech pathology assessments and reports](#).

Can I observe the assessment (and/or any future therapy sessions)?

Generally, if you are attending the appointment with the client or with your child, it is possible to observe sessions. However, it is important you talk with your speech pathologist about this as they may have particular reasons why they want/do not want you observing a session.

Are you happy to speak to my child's teacher /school / paediatrician / physiotherapist / specialist etc.?

With your permission, many speech pathologists are happy to gain information from or provide feedback regarding specific therapy goals to any other professional you or your child may be working with.

Once you have chosen a speech pathologist and the assessment has been completed, you can ask your speech pathologists how to gain the most out of therapy. These questions could include:

- **How often will we have therapy sessions?**
- **What treatment do you recommend and why?**
- **Has it worked for your other clients?**
- **Where can I find out about evidence that supports your recommendations?**
Your speech pathologist may be able to give you specific information to read. The Macquarie University Special Education Centre has a number of briefings about the evidence base for a variety of educational practices: [MUSEC briefings](#)?
- **Will I be involved in choosing therapy goals for myself or my child?**
- **How and when will we set these goals?**
- **How will you know when we have reached the goals?**
- **Can I request progress reports?**
Yes, though there may be a charge associated with writing these reports.

What should I do if I am not comfortable with the assessment or therapy sessions or have further concerns?

In the first instance it is always best to raise any questions or concerns you may have with your speech pathologist. Frequently, these concerns can be addressed quickly and should provide you with confidence in the service you are receiving. If you still have ongoing concerns you can change to another speech pathologist at any time. You can also see Speech Pathology Australia's [Code of Ethics and Information about how to make a complaint](#).

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