



*Ebony Salin*

# Body, Mind & Spirit

## What is Speech Therapy and what does a Speech Language Pathologist do?

Speech therapy is the treatment utilized to address (but not limited to) communication, voice, swallowing, cognitive and memory deficits. The professional, who is certified to treat the above deficits, is known as a Speech language pathologist (SLPs). SLPs are highly-trained professionals who are certified to treat both adults and children ranging in age from birth to 99+ years old.

### A Brief Overview of Services SLPs Provide in a Rehabilitation Setting

**Expressive and Receptive Language Disorders** - Expressive language disorders involve difficulty communicating thoughts/ideas clearly. Receptive language disorders involve difficulty understanding others, this can include difficulties following directions or even answering questions appropriately. SLPs treat both expressive and receptive language disorders. In severe cases, Alternative or Augmentative Communication (AAC) methods may be introduced and used to enhance a patient's ability to communicate their wants and needs if they are unable to do so verbally.

**Speech/Voice Disorders** - Speech/voice disorders can be characterized by slurred speech, reduced loudness, hoarseness, stuttering or producing speech sounds incorrectly. SLPs treat speech/voice disorders with a variety of methods, such as implementing exercises to strengthen the speech muscles and/or teaching speaking strategies to improve speech intelligibility.

**Cognitive impairments** - Cognitive impairments can be caused by many different diagnoses, including (but not limited to) dementia, strokes and brain injury. The previously mentioned brain injuries/diagnoses may cause cognitive deficits in various areas such as orientation, attention, memory, reasoning, problem solving, and/or safety awareness. SLPs implement a variety of techniques to

treat such impairments including exercises to increase mental flexibility and improve skills, compensatory strategies to enhance functional skills despite cognitive decline, and techniques to prevent further decline in progressive cases (such as dementia).

**Swallowing Impairments** - SLPs assess and treat swallowing disorders; this is referred to as dysphagia. Dysphagia is disorder with the process of swallowing. Signs and symptoms of dysphagia include difficulty with keeping foods/liquids in the mouth, pocketing or holding food in the mouth, coughing, choking, throat clearing, wet/gurgly voice after eating/drinking. SLPs have several approaches for treating dysphagia, which include implementation of exercises to improve the functioning of swallowing muscles and or compensatory techniques to decrease symptoms.

### When should you visit a Speech-Language Pathologist?

If you notice any changes in the following areas, please consider visiting a SLP.

**Changes in Cognition** such as, decline in memory, reduced orientation, reduced problem-solving, decreased safety awareness, reduced attention, and difficulty sequencing steps for daily tasks.

**Changes in Communication** including but not limited to reduced comprehension, difficulty following directions, difficulty answering questions, difficulty expressing wants/needs, reduced speech intelligibility, or difficulty with voicing (reduced volume, running out of air while speaking, etc.)

**Changes in Swallowing** may present as difficulty swallowing foods/liquids/meds, displays signs of dysphagia/aspiration during meals, including the following: pocketing of food, holding food/drinks in mouth, coughing, choking, clearing throat during meals, and/or a wet/gurgly voice after eating/drinking.

### When should a child see a Speech-Language Pathologist?

If your child exhibits any disorders or delays, then one of the professionals on their team should be a speech-language pathologist. A speech or language disorder means that the child develops at a slower rate and also has atypical development; an example of atypical development would be developing some age-appropriate skills but missing other skills that should have been developed at a younger age. Whereas, a speech or language delay means that the child can develop their language skills in the predictable order, but is done at a slower rate. Here's a list of some signs that your child should visit a speech-language pathologist.

If your child:

- talks with mostly vowels and no consonants (like saying "wa wa" instead of "water");
- uses one or two sounds to refer to a variety of things (like referring to everything as "da");
- uses language, but imitate words instead of spontaneously saying new ones (if asked "do you want a cookie?" they may repeat "cookie");
- has difficulty with understanding familiar routines, words and/or phrases.
- has limited eye contact, attention span, and limited interest in communicating with others.
- utilizes gestures instead of words to express their wants and needs.

If you would like further information regarding speech-language or hearing, please contact the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for additional information and to assist you in locating a professional speech-language pathologist in your area at [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org).

### About Ebony Salin

Ebony is certified through the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and licensed by the State of Texas as a speech-language pathologist. She received her Bachelor's in Communication Disorders from Lamar University and her Master's degree in Speech Language Pathology from Southern University and A&M College. She has experience working with adult and pediatric populations in academic, medical and private clinical settings where she has specialized in the evaluation and treatment of a variety of disorders such as Speech and language delays; Vocal pathologies; Dysphagia (swallowing); Dysarthria and Cognitive-linguistic impairment resulting from neurological trauma. Ebony strongly believes that everyone has a voice and is able to communicate and it is her role as an SLP to help patients find their voice and to enhance their ability to effectively communicate throughout their environment and community. ♦

**Visit Us on the Web [www.docklinemagazine.com](http://www.docklinemagazine.com)**