



Information Bites...

**Bite sized chunks of information for families
that include a member with a disability**

Speech-Language Pathology in the NWT

What is Speech-Language Pathology?

Speech-Language Pathology helps people overcome and prevent communication disorders and difficulties. This includes disorders of speech, language, voice, fluency and swallowing.

What is speech-language therapy?

Speech-language therapy is the treatment for most children with speech and / or language disorders. A speech disorder refers to a problem with the actual production of sounds, whereas a language disorder refers to a difficulty understanding or putting words together to communicate ideas.

What is a Speech-Language Pathologist?

A Speech-Language Pathologist (S-LP), sometimes known as a Speech- Language Therapist, is a specialist in the assessment, treatment and prevention of communication disorders. Many S-LPs are specialized and work with specific populations or disorders, such as child language, learning disabilities, developmental delays, autism, articulation / phonology, fluency, voice, swallowing, neurogenics, dementia, or acquired brain injury.

In Yellowknife, there are S-LPs who are part of Stanton Territorial Health Authority's Rehabilitation Services. Stanton's Rehabilitation Team (which include an S-LP, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, and Audiologist) also travel to other communities in the NWT and Nunavut to provide rehabilitation clinics. Private practice S-LPs are only available in the Yellowknife area.

When Is Therapy Needed?

Children might need speech-language therapy for a variety of reasons, including:

- hearing impairments
- cognitive or other developmental delays
- weak oral muscles
- birth defects such as cleft lip or palate
- motor planning problems
- respiratory problems (breathing disorders)
- swallowing disorders
- traumatic brain injury

Therapy should begin as soon as possible. Children enrolled in therapy early in their development (younger than 3 years) tend to have better outcomes than those who begin therapy later.

This does not mean that older children or adults can't make progress in therapy; they may progress at a slower rate because they often have learned patterns that need to be changed.

Does my child need a referral to see a Speech-Language Pathologist?

If you have concerns about your child's development, it is worthwhile consulting a S-LP. Referrals can be made by your child's family doctor, pediatrician, teacher, nurse practitioner, etc. In the Northwest Territories you may also refer yourself to Speech-Language Pathology at Stanton Territorial Hospital or a private practice S-LP. After referral, the S-LP will conduct an assessment to determine if therapy is right for your child and conduct assessments as needed.

How is the assessment done?

All speech-language therapy is based upon individual, ongoing assessment of a child's communication skills. The therapist first "screens" all areas of communication, and then does an in-depth assessment of particular areas that may have problems.

What does therapy involve?

In speech-language therapy, an S-LP will work with a child one-to-one, in a small group, or directly in a classroom to overcome difficulties involved with a problem. Therapists use a variety of strategies, including:

- **Language intervention activities** - In these exercises an S-LP will interact with a child by playing and talking. The therapist may use pictures, books, objects, or ongoing events to stimulate language development. The therapist may also model correct pronunciation and use repetition exercises to build speech and language skills.
- **Articulation therapy** - Articulation, or sound production, exercises involve having the therapist model correct sounds and syllables for a child, often during play activities. The level of play is age-appropriate and related to the child's specific needs. The S-LP will physically show the child how to make certain sounds, such as the "r" sound, and may demonstrate how to move the tongue to produce specific sounds.
- **Oral motor/feeding therapy** - The S-LP will use a variety of oral exercises, including facial massage and various tongue, lip, and jaw exercises, to strengthen the muscles of the mouth. The S-LP may also work with different food textures and temperatures to increase a child's oral awareness during eating and swallowing.

Are any costs involved?

Residents of the NWT have coverage for government provided S-LPs through their GNWT Health Cards. Private services are fee for service where the client pays an hourly rate.

For more information contact:

Speech-Language Pathology, Rehabilitation Services: (867) 669-3130



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