

## Speech Therapy at School for Children Who Stutter

(Adapted from an article entitled "Special Education Law & Children Who Stutter" by Lisa Scott-Trautman, Ph.D., The Florida State University and published by the Stuttering Foundation of America, 2003)

A child who stutters may be eligible to receive speech therapy for free from the local school district. A federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA, P.L. 105-17) mandates that state education agencies and local school districts provide special education services to children ages 3-21 who need them in order to receive a **free, appropriate public education (FAPE)**. Speech therapy is considered to be special education. Even though IDEA is designed to provide a free, appropriate public education, children attending private schools are covered under the law too. There are several differences in how the services are provided but even if your child attends a private school, he or she may be eligible to receive free speech therapy from your local school district.

To help you better understand special education law, we provide a basic explanation on how children are identified, screened, evaluated, determined to be eligible for services, and how speech therapy plans are developed for each child. Other considerations are briefly addressed such as parental consent and your rights. Differences in these processes for children who are enrolled in private schools are discussed. Then, speech therapy options are presented for children who are ineligible for services from the schools.

**Getting started: IAT and Screening:** The first step in the special education process is to identify children who need services. IDEA requires that school districts locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities. This process begins when a teacher or parent identifies a concern about a child's ability in the classroom. Your child's teacher may recommend your child be referred to the **Intervention Assistance Team (IAT)** at his/her school. This team will include your child's teacher and probably the speech-language pathologist as well as other school personnel who may have suggestions about how to help your child. You will be notified and invited to participate as part of this team. The purpose of this team is to collect information about your child's stuttering problem and how it is impacting his performance in the classroom. The team may request that the child be **screened**, with your permission, by a **speech-language pathologist**. The team will agree on some strategies that might help your child with his speech in the classroom and at home. They will agree to try these "**interventions**" for a certain amount of time and to document if any change in your child's speech takes place during that time. They will also agree to reconvene at a certain time to review the interventions and what improvement, if any, was noted in your child's speech.

If your child is in **preschool**, you can contact your local school district and ask that your preschooler be screened for stuttering. In the phone book, look under "Special Education" in the listings for the school district's administrative offices or superintendent's office. Second, your pediatrician may make a referral to the local school district because of concerns about your child's talking. Third, under IDEA, each school district has to have a specific plan for finding children who have disabilities so that they may receive appropriate services early. Some school districts meet this requirement by advertising in the local paper a regularly scheduled screening day once a month that you and your child can attend.

**The Multi-factored Evaluation (MFE):** If, after interventions have been tried, the IAT team decides that your child has a "**suspected disability**" with his speech, you will be asked for permission to do a **Multi-factored Evaluation (MFE)**. IDEA requires that the school district conduct a comprehensive evaluation that is

tailored to determine whether your child's stuttering makes him eligible for speech therapy. This means that the school district will have a speech-language pathologist evaluate your child's overall communication skills. Other individuals may be involved as necessary and appropriate. The law also requires that school districts get input from teachers and parents and that parents be on the team that makes the final decision regarding eligibility. Plan on telling the speech-language pathologist when your child first started to talk, when you first noticed her stuttering, whether it has changed over time, how her talking changes in different speaking situations or with different listeners, and whether there is a history of stuttering in your family. Also be prepared to tell the SLP about your child's interests, hobbies, and other activities outside of school.

**Is My Child Eligible for Speech Therapy?** After the evaluation, a team will meet to determine whether your child is eligible for speech therapy. This is decided by comparing your child's evaluation results to guidelines developed by your local school district. The team making this decision consists of you, the speech-language pathologist who evaluated your child, and someone from your local school (i.e. your child's classroom teacher, or an administrator). Other individuals may be involved as necessary and appropriate.

The eligibility decision is based on (1) the testing results from the evaluation, (2) how these results compare to the eligibility guidelines used by the school district, (3) your input, (4) how your child's stuttering affects him in school (**adverse effect**) and (5) the team's opinions regarding whether your child would benefit from therapy. A written report of this **MFE** and the decision about whether and why he is eligible for speech or other special education services will be available to you.

If your child is eligible, an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** will be written within 30 days. If your child is not eligible, you must be notified why in writing. You must also be given information about what to do if you disagree with the team's decision.

**The Individualized Education Plan (IEP):** The **IEP** is a document developed by you and the school to lay out the therapy plan for your child. It also specifically states what services your child will be receiving. It is developed with your input, input from your child's teacher, and from the special education team member(s) who will be working with your child. For stuttering, this is typically a speech-language pathologist.

Certain types of information must be included on every IEP: (1) a statement about your child's **present level of educational performance**, (2) your child's annual **speech therapy goals and objectives**, (3) what **services** will be provided and who is responsible for providing them, (4) the **amount of time** your child will receive services each week, and (5) how **progress** will be measured.

The IEP is written one year at a time and is developed at a meeting that you attend with the school personnel. You must also give consent for the IEP to be used - your child cannot be placed in speech therapy without your consent. At least once a year, a meeting will be scheduled to **review** your child's progress towards his goals and to determine whether new goals need to be written or services need to be changed. The IEP is a flexible document. If your child's needs change before a year has passed, the current IEP should be modified at a new meeting.

**Other considerations:** If you do not agree with the team's recommendations regarding eligibility or placement, there are certain steps you can take to have the recommendations reviewed by an outside person or have your child independently evaluated by another professional. You can also bring an advocate with you to any meeting. For example, if you are paying a speech-language pathologist in private practice to treat your child, you can bring her to school meetings to help plan your child's public school therapy.



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**Children attending private school:** If your child attends a private school but needs speech therapy, the local public school district is still required by IDEA to identify, evaluate, and provide services that are provided to children attending public schools. The main differences for children attending private schools vs. those attending public schools are in how services are delivered and the replacement of the IEP with a "**Service Plan.**" For example, instead of a speech-language pathologist coming to your child's school to provide stuttering therapy, your child may have to walk to the closest elementary school for therapy. The Service Plan is similar to the IEP in many ways in that it will establish annual goals for your child and specify the kinds of services your child will receive. Personnel from your child's school are invited to help determine your child's eligibility for services and to help develop your child's Service Plan.

**If My Child Is Ineligible:** Sometimes even if your child is stuttering, he or she may not be eligible for free speech therapy through the public schools. This does not mean that you cannot get therapy for your child; instead, you will have to find a speech-language pathologist who works in a clinic or private practice to see your child. You will also have to either pay for therapy yourself or have it billed through your health insurance. For information on finding a speech-language pathologist who specializes in stuttering, check <http://www.stutteringhelp.org/resource.htm>. You can also look in the yellow pages under "Speech Therapy," or under your local hospital's "Outpatient Services" department.

**Additional Resources:** You can find additional information on IDEA, evaluation procedures, how you can contribute to your child's IEP, and children in private schools by going to the following web sites:

**Questions and Answers About IDEA:** [www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21txt.htm](http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21txt.htm)

**The Evaluation Process:**  
[www.fape.org/pubs/PHP-C2.pdf](http://www.fape.org/pubs/PHP-C2.pdf)

**Parents and IEPs:**  
[www.fape.org/pubs/FAPE-25%20Planning%20Your%20Childs%20IEP.pdf](http://www.fape.org/pubs/FAPE-25%20Planning%20Your%20Childs%20IEP.pdf)

**Children in Private Schools:** [www.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/brief10.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/brief10.html)