

Navigating an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)

How do I know which service provider is right for my child when communication is the primary concern? Knowing the difference between a special education teacher and a speech-language pathologist can support your decision-making process.

	Special Educator	Speech-Language Pathologist
Role Definition	Supports overall child development, focusing on cognitive, social-emotional, and adaptive skills.	Assesses and treats communication, speech, language, and feeding/swallowing skills. Supports overall child development, focusing on cognitive, social-emotional, and adaptive skills
Primary Focus	Enhancement of child development—including play, social skills, behavior, and early learning.	Assessment and treatment for speech, language, communication, and feeding/swallowing. Enhancement of child development—including play, social skills, behavior, and early learning.
Target Outcomes	To improve cognitive, adaptive, and social-emotional skills for overall child development.	To improve communication skills to include understanding and multimodal language use such as spoken language, signs, and/or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). To improve feeding/swallowing skills. To improve cognitive, adaptive, and social-emotional skills for overall child development.

	Special Educator	Speech-Language Pathologist
Family Involvement	Provides parent coaching to help integrate strategies into the child’s daily routines.	Provides parent coaching to help integrate <u>communication strategies</u> and <u>feeding/swallowing techniques</u> into the child’s daily routines.
Populations Served	Children with developmental delays. Some special educators may have additional specialized training and additional expertise supporting specific populations—such as infants and toddlers with autism or with vision and/or hearing loss.	Children with communication delays or disorders and/or with feeding/swallowing disorders. Specialized expertise supporting communication for specific populations such as infants and toddlers with autism, global developmental delays, vision and/or hearing loss.
Settings	Homes, daycare centers, preschools, community settings.	Homes, daycare centers, preschools, community settings, clinics, teletherapy, healthcare settings.
Educational Background (Entry level requirement)	Bachelor’s or master’s degree in special education, early childhood special education, or related field.	Master’s degree in speech-language pathology or communication sciences and disorders (required for state licensure and ASHA certification).
Licensing and Credentialing	State teaching license or special education certification. State may require an early intervention credential.	State licensure and may hold ASHA Certification (CCC-SLP; certificate of clinical competence as a speech-language pathologist) State may require an early intervention credential.

	Special Educator	Speech-Language Pathologist
Examples of other titles besides “special educator” or “speech-language pathologist”	<p>Developmental specialist</p> <p>Early interventionist</p> <p>Special instructor Developmental therapist</p>	<p>Speech therapist</p> <p>Speech pathologist</p> <p>SLP</p>
Funding Sources	IDEA Part C funding with families sharing the cost in some states.	Medicaid, private insurance, IDEA Part C funding with families sharing the cost in some states.
Scope of Practice	<p>Division for Early Childhood Position Statement: The Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention (Revised 2024)</p>	<p>American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA): Scope of Practice in Speech-Language Pathology</p> <p>ASHA Practice Portal Page: Early Intervention</p>