

Early Years Great Careers

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What do speech pathologists do?

Speech pathologists play a vital role in the early childhood sector, which supports the development, health and wellbeing of young children, including babies and toddlers. Speech pathologists assess and treat children and adults who have a communication disability or difficulty swallowing food or drink. Speech pathologists work in hospitals, community health centres, rehabilitation centres and schools in metropolitan, regional or rural locations.

Speech pathologists use tests and special equipment to assess the nature and severity of communications limitations and then plan and carry out a program of treatment and management. This will take into account factors like the client's age and any disabilities or developmental delays. Speech pathologists who work in early childhood:

- Support children who are unable to communicate effectively due to conditions such as cleft palate, hearing loss, stuttering, delayed speech or language development, cerebral palsy or emotional disturbances.
- Assess and assist children who have difficulty chewing and swallowing.
- Act as a consultant to education, medical, dental and other health professionals.

- Provide ongoing counselling, advice and information to children and families.

Fast facts

- Employment prospects in the early childhood and allied health sectors generally are strong and growing.
- Employment opportunities for speech pathologists are excellent; there is almost no unemployment in speech pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy professions.
- Federal Government labour market forecasting shows that in the coming years more than 26 per cent of new jobs will be in the health care and social assistance sector, making it the largest employer.
- Salaries commence at \$56,770 a year and will increase depending on experience and responsibilities.
- Speech pathologists have the opportunity to specialise in particular clinical areas such as paediatrics, early childhood intervention services, swallowing, voice and disability.
- There are opportunities to work as a specialist clinician or to diversify to other areas such as management, consultancy, education, research and private practice.

Future employment rating ★★★★★

*Future employment growth 11% PA or more. Source: DEEWR

What should I study at school?

Useful subjects include English, advanced maths, biology, chemistry, physics, health and human development, VET Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance.

What should I study at university?

Bachelor of Health Science (three years)
Bachelor of Speech Pathology (three years)
Master of Speech Pathology (two years)

Entry can be from Certificate III and IV in Allied Health Assistance. Completion of Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance may provide some credit to the degree program.

What are my other career and leadership options?

Once qualified, management and leadership opportunities include consulting, government and practice management roles.

Related career options include audiologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist or rehabilitation counsellor.

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Zara Karagiannis Speech pathologist
(early childhood intervention)

What are your major qualifications?

I have a Bachelor of Health Sciences (Speech Pathology).

How long have you worked in early childhood?

For 18 months at Specialist Children's Services, and three and a half years at Cerebral Palsy Education Centre.

What is a typical day?

I work with children with developmental delay, neurological impairments, physical disabilities, complex communication needs and feeding and swallowing impairments.

I visit children and families in places such as their homes and early childhood education and care services and empower them with strategies and supports.

I work in collaboration with therapists including dietitians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, psychologists, educational advisors and other speech pathologists.

What made you change to early childhood?

I intended to work with adults with disabilities. In my final study year I participated in a camp for children with complex communication needs who used Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC), such as light-tech communication books and high-tech electronic speech generating devices. This converted my thinking and formed my desire to work with young children.

What influenced your interest in an early childhood career?

I am a part-time carer to my sister Angela, who was born with cerebral palsy. I have been exposed to disability services all my life and have made it my life's goal to support children to become autonomous communicators. Early intervention has improved a lot since my sister used these services; I want to help continue this.

What do you enjoy most?

My niche is AAC and I love exploring light-tech and high-tech AAC as one of many ways for children to communicate autonomously.

I have a very mixed case load that keeps me on my toes. I'm forever learning how other early childhood professional disciplines intertwine with mine.

Without communication life can be extremely challenging. I love knowing that I'm supporting someone to access life and expand their horizons; every change, no matter what magnitude, is a huge victory that I get to share with those children and their families.

What is the best experience you have had as an early childhood professional?

A client, who was diagnosed with Autism and is completely non-verbal, independently used a communication book to say "Uh oh [it's] finished. More play." The mother had tears in her eyes; it was the first time her daughter had communicated her own autonomous message.

What would you say to others who might be considering a career in early childhood?

Early childhood intervention helps provide the foundations for lifelong development. Solid foundations give a child the best springboard into their future. There's no greater feeling knowing that your support in the present is for an optimal future.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

I would like to further my expertise in AAC. With developments in technology, imagination's the limit. I would love to lead trans-disciplinary teams of therapists to support children to access AAC and communicate autonomously.

Want to know more?

education.vic.gov.au/earlyyears-careers
deewr.gov.au
myfuture.edu.au
careers.thatchatter.com.au
joboutlook.gov.au



All indicative salaries in the document are gross before tax a year for full time employees. Indicative salary figures are taken from http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/Documents/VPS_Salary_Rates.pdf, Allied Health 2.2.1. Salaries will vary depending on employer, role and Award.

Information regarding course and professional pre-requisites is of a general nature. Please consult a career practitioner and/or check with individual institutions to confirm specific course requirements.