

# Counseling 101 for SLPs

SLPs frequently find themselves on the front lines of helping individuals adjust to life-changing events. An adult client suffers a stroke and is adjusting to marked changes in his lifestyle. A child receives a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and the family is reeling from all of the ramifications. Use the information below to help your clients and their families work through their emotions during these challenging times.

## The SLP's Role

- Counseling activities are within the Scope of Practice for SLPs. SLPs may counsel individuals, families, coworkers, educators, and other persons regarding “acceptance, adaptation, and decision-making about communication and swallowing” (ASHA, 2001).
- SLPs are not licensed/credentialed mental health professionals and are not qualified to diagnose and/or treat mental illnesses, including depression and anxiety disorders. SLPs should refer patients who exhibit symptoms of mental illness to appropriate mental health professionals.
- Counseling creates an interpersonal, helping relationship in which the goal is to support patients and their families who experience emotional distress related to a communication disorder (Shibley, as cited by Roseberry-McKibbin & Hegde, 2006).
- SLPs face situations in which counseling is an integral part of service delivery.

## Counseling Microskills (Flasher & Fogle, 2004; Luterman, 2008)

- Encouragers (“Uh-huh,” “Yes,” and “Ummm”) can be useful ways to influence the direction of the conversation and to elicit more information from the patient or family.
- Use smiling, eye contact, leaning forward, head nodding, and open body posture.
- Use neutral expressions (“Hmm,” “Perhaps,” or “That’s interesting”) when you don’t know what to say or don’t want to say what you are really thinking. (“Interesting” conveys neutrality.) Guard against overuse or you will eventually sound disingenuous to the client. A moment of silence may be more appropriate.
- Speak in a caring, responsive manner.
- Good counseling techniques should seem natural and be transparent. If an individual knows she is being counseled, then the counseling is probably not being done correctly.
- Don’t be bound to one philosophy, theory, or approach. Develop your own paradigm—a central organizer as a personal strategy for understanding and explaining reality. We are each influenced by our own experiences and biases.

A wise response and some well-spoken counsel can help individuals and their families adjust to life-changing events and positively impact the outcomes to therapy.

For more practical information on counseling for SLPs, download the LinguSystems Guide to Counseling for SLPs at [linguistystems.com](http://linguistystems.com) (click on FREE Downloads). Also, take the FREE online CE course, Counseling Theories and Skills for SLPs by Hope Reed, SLP.D., CCC-SLP, at [linguistystems.com](http://linguistystems.com).

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA 2001). *Scope of practice in speech-language pathology*. Retrieved October 9, 2009, from [asha.org/docs/html/SP2001-00193.html](http://asha.org/docs/html/SP2001-00193.html)

Flasher, L.V., & Fogle, P.T. (2004). *Counseling skills for speech-language pathologists and audiologists*. Canada: Thompson Delmar Learning.

Luterman, D.M. (2008). *Counseling persons with communication disorders and their families* (5th ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.

Reed, H. (2009). *LinguSystems guide to counseling for SLPs*. East Moline, IL: LinguSystems, Inc.

Roseberry-McKibbin, C., & Hegde, M.N. (2006). *An advanced review of speech-language pathology: Preparation for NESPA and comprehensive examination* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.

Shibley, K.G., & Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (2005). *Interviewing and counseling in communicative disorders: Principles and procedures*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.

Adapted from LinguSystems Guide to Counseling for SLPs  
Copyright © 2009 LinguSystems, Inc.

**Click on FREE Downloads at [linguistystems.com](http://linguistystems.com) to print this page.**



**To counsel effectively, SLPs must continuously cultivate these qualities.**

(Roseberry-McKibbin & Hegde, 2006;  
Shibley & Roseberry-McKibbin, 2005)