

FAQs: SI and Autism

1. Can a child be deemed eligible for speech therapy if standard scores on formal speech and language testing indicate functioning within normal limits?

ANSWER: Yes. Remember eligibility is based on academic AND functional needs. Children with high functioning forms of Autism often do well on traditional language tests and may even indicate above average academic language skills. However, their impairment lies in the social aspects of language and the impact on the student's behavior and ability to form relationships with others. These skills may not be reflected or measured on a standardized test. It is important to include other sources of data in your evaluation to accurately assess the functional implications of the communication impairment.

2. Do I have to follow the test protocol in order to report information gained from the administration of a standardized test?

ANSWER: You must follow the published protocol for standardized tests in order to obtain and report valid standard scores. However, in evaluating some students on the autism spectrum it is sometimes useful to alter the test protocol in an effort to observe behaviors and measure abilities in a functional manner. If you attempt a standardized test and find the student is unable to follow the protocol but can demonstrate the skill with modifications, it is appropriate to continue with the test for anecdotal data. You will not be able to score the protocol and you must accurately describe your modifications and results in narrative form.

3. Do I have to address assistive technology as part of my evaluation?

ANSWER: Yes. AT consideration is required by law for every FIE and as part of every annual ARD. The degree to which you address or assess AT depends on the child. In the case of a child who is nonverbal augmentative communication should be a consideration at the very least. Depending on the child's level of functioning, experience, and current methods of communication, an in depth AAC evaluation may be required. Be cognizant of the students preferred method of response before beginning any evaluation. If a child is already using an AAC device (low tech or high tech) it must be available to that student during testing by the SLP and others on the evaluation team.

4. How do I determine the need for direct vs. indirect services?

ANSWER: The decision is made on a case by case basis depending on the educational needs of the child. Remember that when SI is secondary to another disabling condition (in this case autism), speech therapy services function to support access to the special education program. In making your determination consider the student's educational history, present levels of performance, learning style, response to interventions, current goals and objectives, learning environment, expected outcomes, and level of expertise amongst service providers.

5. Don't all students with autism automatically qualify for speech therapy services?

ANSWER: No. All students on the autism spectrum will have a communication disorder (it is an inherent part of the disability). However, eligibility is determined in three stages: 1) Is there a disorder? 2) Does it impact educational performance? 3) Are the services of an SLP required? While the likelihood of a child with autism requiring speech therapy services is high, it is not an "automatic." In making your determination consider the student's educational history, present levels of performance, learning style, response to interventions, current goals and objectives, other support services, learning environment, expected outcomes, and the level of expertise amongst service providers .