

Hamaguchi & Associates Office Policies

We feel our therapeutic relationship is a partnership, built on mutual respect, trust, and a clear understanding of how we will work together. For that reason, it's important for you to know how our program is run. We apologize in advance for all the "rules and regulations." After years of running a practice and having situations that have occurred, we have found that it has become necessary to have them written down, and agreed to, so there are no misunderstandings.

What We Should Be Providing You:

- The speech pathologist should help you have a clear understanding of the goals for your child's program. You should feel comfortable giving input as to your priorities for your child's therapy program and receive the annual goals in writing within a month or so of beginning therapy. If the speech pathologist feels the goals you are seeking are not realistic, or within her training or scope of practice, she should discuss this with you as well.
- The speech pathologist should greet your child warmly, and show enthusiasm for working with your child.
- The speech pathologist will take great time and care to prepare an engaging and appropriate lesson for your child. We ask that if there are specific areas you'd like to focus on that have perhaps come up during the week, you leave a voicemail in advance or have some flexibility in terms of when/how it will be incorporated. We love integrating functional activities, but hope you'll understand that there is typically preparation involved.
- **Annual Testing:** We generally start with our own testing or recent testing from other providers. That said, at least once a year (or 6-12 months for younger children) we have to retest certain subtests to check for progress, and perhaps test new skills/concepts if we feel there are new concerns that need to be explored or more advanced skills we think your child is ready for. We then update your child's goals accordingly. This is required for best practices and our license in order to show progress and the continued need for treatment, as well as the fact that it is typically required for insurance reimbursement. Assessment sessions are billed at twice our therapy rate. Retesting is 1-2 sessions max. Your child's speech pathologist will notify you in advance when these sessions will be held so you are alerted to the change in the fee structure for that session(s). You will be provided a one-page "Test Report Summary" that will list the names/scores of the tests for your records, as well as a copy of the updated goals.
- *You should see progress over time.* For some children, it may be week to week; for others it may take more time and be over months. However, certainly within 3-6 months there should be some demonstrated growth in the goal areas. For some children with severe disabilities, this may even take longer. If there is not observable progress, you should discuss it with your child's speech pathologist. In some cases where there are severe disabilities, your child may need a more specialized type of intervention, a different therapy model or require a speech pathologist with a different skill set. Please know our foremost concern –as is yours- is to make sure your child is improving. If we cannot make that happen, it's time to reassess what we are doing.
- You should never feel foolish asking questions. It's important to know why we are doing what we are doing and how it is helping your child. These sessions are expensive and time-consuming and you should never, ever feel awkward asking questions. All we ask is that you do so during your child's scheduled therapy time and not as we are walking down the hall to pick up our next child ☺
- You should feel comfortable observing your child, should you wish to. (see "Helpful Hints for Observing Your Child" enclosed.)
- We encourage you to have us maintain some kind of ongoing communication with your child's other therapists when appropriate, typically through a notebook, where we can attach your child's speech/language/auditory "homework" and any comments. However, due to time constraints, we can only offer infrequent phone calls outside the therapy session to you, teachers and other therapists without

incurring additional fees (approximately one call every few months-less than 15 minutes in duration).

- The front office staff and speech- language pathologists are expected to address you in a courteous manner at all times and return calls promptly (typically within a business day, or the next day the speech pathologist is in the office).
- Working with your child is an honor and a privilege. We take it very seriously and will do our best to find the right combination of therapy strategies to help maximize your child's progress. We have an extraordinary amount of therapy materials at our disposal, and participate in numerous continuing education courses each year to keep our skills current. We have a team of speech pathologists on staff, all with different areas of specialty, who are easily accessed for interoffice input when needed. Please know we will care for your child's communication skills from our hearts.

What We Need You to Know About the Policies of Our Practice:

All fees are due at each session. We do not send bills. We can set up an ACH (automatic bank withdrawal) or credit card on file for you. Personal checks, Visa, Mastercard, or American Express are also accepted.

1. When you have a scheduled therapy time, you are contracting for a specified amount of our professional time (usually 30, 45 or 60 minutes). Direct therapy is usually concluded about 5-7 minutes before the session is over in order to review the exercises with you and answer any questions you may have. All conversations regarding your child need to take place during the child's scheduled therapy time. Questions should be directed to the speech pathologist during the scheduled session time. We ask that email be used very sparingly, with the understanding that responses are best given in person, during the therapy time. Additionally, your child's speech pathologist will not be available for subsequent conversations after the session, as their schedules are completely booked. Current fees are: Individual sessions- \$108 per half hour; \$162 per 45 minutes, \$216 per hour.

2. Session frequency and length: Sessions are scheduled for 45 or 60 minute sessions, or at least two sessions of 30-minutes length. Opportunities to schedule one 30-minute session are very rare, and generally reserved for Fast ForWord supervision and articulation carryover maintenance. Additionally, 30-minute sessions are offered before 2pm. All session after 2pm are 45 or 60 minutes in length.

3. Groups Sessions: Group sessions are scheduled when appropriate, and typically current clients who have received individual services are given priority. Fees for each child are: \$114 per 45 minute session for a group of 3 or more children, \$146 per 45 minute dyad session, for a group of 2 children. If you normally pay \$114 for a group session, but your child's group is temporarily reduced to 2 children due to cancellations, you will still be charged your normal fee. (Please be aware that our usual fee for a group of 2 is \$146) *If the group is permanently changed to a group of two, we will have to start charging our regular fee for the smaller group.* If you normally pay \$114 for a group session, but your child's group is reduced to *only one child*, you can opt to cancel (not counted towards your absences) or pay our usual private session fee, \$162 and have a 45-minute individual session. We will attempt to call you as soon as we know this situation is occurring so you can decide what you want to do, but sometimes we get very late notice and this is not possible.

4. Lateness: If you are late to your appointment, your child's session will still need to conclude at the usual time in order to keep our schedule on track and you will be billed for the entire scheduled session. If you are late to pick up your child, your speech pathologist will not be able to chat with you once your session time is officially "over" as she will need to begin working with the next child and/or prepare for the next session. If you arrive late for more than a session or two, you will likely be contacted by the Director, as having an unsupervised child in our office presents a liability to us and interferes with the front office staff's ability to get work done.

5. Disruption of a session: If your child is not feeling well once the session begins or tantrums or refuses to participate to the point that the session is no longer productive, the speech pathologist may decide to stop the session. If less than half the session has taken place, you will be charged ½ the usual fee. If it is past the halfway point, you will be charged the full fee. If the issue is behavioral, we will work with you to try and minimize a reoccurrence. However, if the

behavioral difficulties continue frequently enough that the therapy is minimally productive (and tiring or stressful for the treating speech pathologist), the Director will be consulted.

6. Additional Services Request: Reports and consultations with other professionals require additional time and notice. We have a form (“Additional Service Request Form”) for any additional services you require including reports, letters, preparation of special materials, review of goals, phone calls/emails to other professionals etc. which details the associated fees for each service. If you require any services outside the normal therapy session, please anticipate a 3-week period to have the document or materials prepared, as we will need to schedule our staff appropriate time to complete the requested service.

8. Legal/Marital Issues: We will decline to participate in IEP meetings, lawsuits/due process against schools or intermarital/custodial squabbles. *Please do not involve us in legal proceedings as we don't wish to get in the middle of them.* We will not provide a deposition unless ordered by a court, whereupon you will be billed \$204 an hour for our time from door to door, including traveling and waiting, sessions' fees missed, and any fees for legal counsel we incur to prepare for it. Our office will not act as a mediator between custodial parents, relay information about a child's sessions to a non-custodial parent, or mediate scheduling or payment plans between ex-spouses.

9. Confidentiality: Please honor the confidentiality of the other families in this practice and do not watch other children's therapy sessions, unless they are participating in a group with your child at that time. Additionally, your child's speech pathologist should have conversations about your child's progress in the privacy of the therapy office and not in the hallway or waiting area within earshot of other families. Please also understand that asking personal questions of other waiting parents (“What's wrong with your child? Is your child autistic? Why does he keep doing that?”) or offering unsolicited advice is an invasion of their privacy and may make someone uncomfortable. If a parent wants to share this information, they will, but asking these kinds of direct questions of strangers is not appropriate and often stressful for some families.

10. Cancelling an appointment: Please cancel all appointments with at least 24 hours notice. If an emergency does come up, please leave a message on the speech pathologist's voicemail extension, as the front office may not check their messages until after the SLP has arrived and begun prepping for the day's sessions. You will be charged your full fee if we do not receive at least 3 hours' notice or are a “no-show.” Your child is allowed to miss up to 6 sessions per calendar year if he/she comes once a week, 12 sessions if he/she comes twice a week, 18 sessions if he/she comes 3 times a week, etc. The days we are closed or the therapist is out, are not counted towards absences. **After that, you will be charged ½ the regular session fee of any session cancelled, for any reason to hold your child's slot.** Insurance companies do not reimburse for cancellation fees. Due to scheduling constraints, no make-ups are allowed. *If you are starting the program after February, the number will be prorated accordingly:*
After February 28th: 5 sessions, after April 30th: 4 sessions, after June 30th: 3 sessions, after August 31st: 2 sessions, and after October 31st: 1 session.

11. Bringing a sick child for therapy: Please don't bring a child who has been actively sick, to our office. If your child was sent home that day from school, is lethargic, sleepy, has pink-eye, is feverish, or unduly coughing and sneezing (other than allergies) he/she probably won't benefit from the session anyway. In addition, if you bring your child to our office, you place the other children, who may be medically fragile, as well as staff members, at risk. While it is frustrating to have to use up your absences or even pay for a session with less than 3 hours' notice, we ask that you do have consideration for the other children and adults who work closely with your child by keeping him/her home or switch to teletherapy, as long as we receive an hours notice.

12. Let's all get along! We feel a happy, calm working environment is critical for the children, staff and families who participate in our program. There may be times where you are frustrated with a situation. Please keep a calm voice and express your concerns or questions in a polite manner. *Please don't take your frustration out on our staff as they are merely doing their job the best they can.* They don't set the fees, formulate the office policies or have the ability to create an opening if one doesn't exist. If you feel the staff is not adequately addressing your concerns or problem, please contact Patti Hamaguchi directly. Clients who are repeatedly belligerent, raise their voices, use profanity or upset the staff or clientele will be asked to seek services elsewhere. While it's rare, one nasty person can upset the whole office, and that in turn saps the energy and enthusiasm we all need to do our therapy.

13. Changing/Cancelling your child's schedule: If the day/time of your child's therapy session does not work for you,

please let our front office know. However, with our schedules being typically 100% booked, there may be no other option for us to offer you, but we can certainly put you on our “in-house” waiting list. **Please do not ask the speech pathologists to schedule appointments**, as they are handled by our front office, after being approved by the Director. We must follow our contracts and labor laws and cannot demand a speech pathologist stay late, use their lunch or break-time to accommodate your personal schedule. There are many reasons you will need to terminate or change your child’s program, including the fact that your child has finished up and his original speech difficulty is gone. (YAY!!) Or you may have a change in your financial status or scheduling, and you simply find you cannot continue your child’s current program as frequently as you initially thought you could. It happens, and that’s ok. We understand. However, all changes or cancellations require that you must fill out our “Notice to Cancel Services” form, even if you are only dropping one of two scheduled sessions within a week. It is on our website (Current Clients page) or available from the front office administrator. *It must be received at least 15 days prior to your child’s last therapy session.* You will be billed for all therapy sessions that are scheduled for your child during the last 15-day period of your child’s program, whether your child attends them or not, regardless of the reason. The day we receive this form is considered day #1. If you do not hand-deliver the form, please call and make sure we received it. We will review with you which scheduled appointments fall into the last 15 day period, based on when we ultimately received this completed form. In other words, you cannot tell us, “I am giving you my 15 day notice, but my child won’t be attending the next two weeks.” That is not 15 days notice—it is zero notice, and so again, please understand that you *will be billed in full for all sessions that fall into the last 15 days of your child’s program.*

14. The waiting list: The waiting list consists of applications from interested clients who are waiting for services. When possible, we give preference to current clients who would like to have additional services. We do not have the list prioritized according to when they are received. We select the child for the opening based upon many factors, primarily the nature of the child’s difficulties, the skill and training of the speech pathologist with the opening, and keeping a healthy mix of ages and types of disorders within a single caseload. For example, when a speech pathologist has a number of “high energy” children in a row, we may prefer to select a child who can sit and focus more readily should an opening occur so our staff doesn’t become burned out.

15. The following conditions will typically result in your child's services being discontinued:

- Recurrent no-shows
- Non-payment of fees or persistent lateness in payment
- After warnings, persisting in picking up your child late from their sessions or dropping your child off and leaving before services are due to begin
- Child’s resistance to therapy or a lack of cooperation (refusing to follow directions, running away, physical aggression toward the clinician including hitting, biting, scratching or kicking; frequent crying/screaming, falling on the floor, running away, getting up out of the chair, etc.)
- A lack of progress
- Parents engaging in behavior that breaches trust (withholding or altering reports from us or other professionals, misrepresenting your child's condition/history to us, asking us to mis-state facts, misrepresent or omit information about your child's condition or therapy for the purposes of receiving insurance reimbursement) * Parents raising their voice to staff, threatening, yelling or upsetting staff or waiting clients
- Persistent problems with children causing damage to the courtyard area or disrupting other businesses

16. If it doesn’t work out: If we feel our training or type of therapy is not compatible with your child’s specific needs, you will be referred to another practice. If at any time you are not satisfied with your child’s therapy program, please contact Patti Hamaguchi, our Director. *You are never obligated to continue your child’s therapy program if you are in any way dissatisfied with your child’s progress or therapy* but we do ask for a 48 hour notice. In this case, we would refund any remaining credit on your account, such as prepaid sessions, subtracting any remaining balance.

17. Supervising your children/Late pick ups after sessions are over: Please do not leave your children unattended in the waiting room at any time, as our front office staff cannot be responsible for supervising them. This includes dropping them off or picking up your children late from their sessions. Our front office and other parents are not able to take responsibility for your child. Most importantly, if you are late to pick up your child, you won’t be able to chat with the speech pathologist about the session, which is a critical piece of your child’s program. Should we have ongoing issues with late pick ups, the Director will be notified, and will contact you.

18. We ask that you do not leave our office area while your child receives services if participating in a group or if your child is unable to use the restroom independently. We are so sorry, but our staff cannot assist children in the bathroom stalls. This has become an issue when children let us know they have to go to the bathroom and the parents have left the premises. Children who are not yet independent in the bathroom must have a parent nearby who can

accompany them to the restroom should the need arise during their individual therapy sessions. If your child is receiving an individual session and is able to use the bathroom independently, our SLP staff will walk them to the bathroom and wait for them, then escort them back to the office. During groups, we do not have the staff available to escort children to the bathroom and so we ask that group parents stay on-site.

19. Aging out of our practice: Our practice generally sees children up until the age of about 13, max, aside from mild articulation. As your child nears adolescence, we will need to make a plan as to how and where to transition your child for services. We feel it's important for your older child to participate in a practice which has the staff, appropriate training and materials to work with the older age group.

20. Changing up Therapists: We have found that is usually helpful to "change up" the speech pathologist who works with your child during individual therapy sessions, every few years. Over time, children often become bored or stuck in a routine with a particular therapy style or speech pathologist. For that reason, we will most likely suggest rotating your child to a different speech pathologist after several years, assuming the other available speech pathologist's skills are also an appropriate match.

Please understand that we need to apply our office policies consistently, for each family. Please do not ask us to waive our policies "just this once" or "just for your child", as we will be unable to do so out of fairness to the rest of our families who adhere to the policies stated above. Our front office staff does not have the authority to do so, and we ask that you do not ask or pressure them to make exceptions. If you are uncomfortable with our policies or fees and do not intend to honor them, we ask that you refrain from scheduling appointments with our practice.

Questions and Answers About Our Billing & Office Policies

Q. Why don't you take insurance?

A. There are so many reasons we don't take insurance, but let me try to explain as best I can. Taking insurance for some families would mean a significant drop in revenue for our practice. It would add to our overhead in the need to hire additional staff to manage the paperwork and reduce the number of hours my SLP staff could see children in order for them to keep up with the huge demands for reports. The negotiated rates themselves are typically 60-70% of our normal fees. The only way to compensate for the revenue loss would be to drastically cut the salary of my staff and reduce or eliminate their benefits as well as cut back on the very expensive continuing education we provide for our staff. In addition, our fees for those who pay out of pocket would have to rise much more significantly to fill the gap. That in turn would guarantee a mass exodus of our private clients, but also a team of SLPs who have been carefully selected, trained and mentored to do the kind of specialized work we do at our practice. I would instead be forced to use lesser-qualified SLP staff (or supervised graduate students) and likely endure frequent staff turnover, which is often the case at practices who pay their staff from insurance rates and provide little, if any benefits. Lastly, insurance companies frequently approve therapy at the outset but then renege after the claims are submitted and deny the claim, often leaving the practice with sizable unreimbursed expenses. The time and energy spent trying to recover these fees can exhaust the office staff but also the SLP staff, who would be spending inordinate amounts of time writing appeal letters and justifying their work. In considering whether to be "in network" with any insurance company when I opened this practice, I considered these issues very carefully and made the decision to be private pay only. Many of our clients do receive out-of-network benefits and we do our best to provide receipts and reports that help in that regard. However, I am quite firm in my position regarding insurance. *My vision and goal for this practice is to provide the highest quality of care possible with the best team available, and that goal (for me) is incompatible with accepting insurance.*

Q. If my child's bus is late coming home, he may be late for his appointment sometimes. Since that's not really our fault, I don't think it's fair that we have to pay for his whole session, since he will miss almost 15 minutes. We won't have to pay for the full 45 minutes, will we?

A. I'm afraid so. If you expect this to be a problem, we ask that you select a later time for your child's appointment.

Q. I'd like to have just one 30-minute appointment at 4:00, but it was declined. I was told I had to schedule it for 45 minutes. Why is that so?

A. Each child's session takes a bit of preparation, including writing documentation notes, organizing the materials, following up with outside professionals, and writing reports when requested. Additionally, it is very difficult to have a therapy session and talk to the parent, review the homework all in 30 minutes. Except for very mild articulation cases, it generally is not a sufficient amount of time to really make satisfactory progress with a child. In order not to burn out the staff as well as make the best use of the afternoon hours, we have decided to only book in 45 and 60 minute increments during these very busy time frames. We will still encourage parents who schedule in the earlier hours whose children have shorter attention spans to consider at least 2 sessions per week in order to make sufficient progress.

Q. On the way to our appointment, our son got sick in the car and we had to go back home. We called about 10 minutes into his appointment. We certainly didn't intend to give such late notice, but it couldn't be helped. We won't be charged for this, will we?

A. We are so sorry, but yes, you will. Regardless of the reason, appointments that are cancelled with less than 3 hours' notice will have to be charged at the usual rate. Please understand that our staff spends about 20 minutes preparing for each session, including the gathering of materials. They decline other appointments because they have planned to see your child. Unlike physicians who overbook or only set aside 5-10 minutes per appointment, we do not. With most therapy and psychology practices requiring 24 hours' notice for full billing, we feel the 3 hour minimum is already generous.

Q. The speech pathologist my daughter will be seeing at your practice is new to us. I'm sure she is wonderful, but I'm nervous about committing to a contract with a new person. What if doesn't work out the way I'd like? What should I do?

A. We understand your apprehension. Change is always difficult, and let's face it, not every speech pathologist is a good fit for each child. We consider the first 4 weeks of therapy a "test drive". If at that point (or sooner) you are not comfortable with the child/therapist fit, please do give Kristen White, our Director, a call. All we ask is for 48 hours' notice to cancel your child's program. After the first 4 weeks, you will need to give us the usual 15 days notice to cancel the appointment schedule. As a general rule, our staff has decided to decline rescheduling clients with other staff members, should they decide to cancel their program so you should anticipate looking outside our practice if you cancel your program with us.

Q. I like to run errands during my child's session or make a cell phone call in the courtyard. Is this ok?

A. Sure, as long as your child is able to use the restroom by him/herself, you are free to drop your child off. If your child participates in a group session, you must also remain onsite as we do not have staff available to bring children to the bathroom during the session. Upon arrival, please wait with your child until the speech pathologist comes for your child, and then you may leave. If you do drop off your child, please make extra sure that you have an updated Emergency Contact form and can be readily available should we need to reach you. However, you must return promptly, with at least 5-7 minutes left, so that the speech pathologist may review your child's session and follow-up activities with you. If you are late in picking up your child, we cannot provide babysitting services and this can present a significant problem for our staff. Moreover, if the speech pathologist does not have the time to review the session activities or follow-up home component, it takes away from the effectiveness of our services. Due to our tight schedules, we cannot extend the session to make time to do this if you are late. If you frequently come late to pick up your child, the Director will be contacted, and will be in touch with you. In these cases, we will ask that you remain onsite during your child's services.

Q. We are going on a 3-week trip. We would like to not have to count those three weeks towards our child's 3 missed session total, as she has already been sick once. What can we do to avoid racking up all 4 missed sessions due to our trip?

A. Regardless of why your child misses sessions, these sessions will be counted towards the total allowed and all future absences will be billed at ½ the rate for the appointment. In this case, your only option is to give 2 weeks' notice to withdraw your child. When you return, you can call our office and see if there is an appointment available for your child. In most cases, you should expect that your timeslot will have been taken by another family and you may need to be placed on a waiting list.

Q. I'm just curious. Why is speech therapy so expensive?

A. Yes, it is, and please know that we take our job and responsibility to you (and your pocketbook) very seriously. Let's start with the amount of education and training that is required to do our job. A licensed speech-language pathologist goes to college for an average of 7-8 years, followed by a "fellowship year" under a senior speech pathologist, and has to pass a test similar to a lawyer's bar exam. Because of this-and the significant shortage in licensed speech pathologists in California, the pay scale for speech pathologists has risen sharply in the last few years, coupled with the fact that we must meet or exceed other work settings' benefit packages in order to attract "the best and the brightest". Our office spends thousands of dollars a year in materials and continued training for our staff. Our lack of turnover and the quality of our staff is a testament to the fact that it is a worthwhile investment. Add to all this, the rent for office space in Cupertino is sky high, the payroll taxes and Workmans' Compensation fees in CA are extensive, and you can perhaps see that our fixed overhead takes up nearly all our gross income. Please know that we are sensitive to the fact that coming to see us is truly a big sacrifice for you, and that is why we work so hard to help your child succeed. It is a big investment in their future.

Q. I'd like to commit to the appointment schedule that is being offered, but there will be a 6-week period where my son will be in soccer and the therapy time will conflict with his practices. What should I do?

A. You will need to make a choice. You can keep the appointment schedule with us and know that you will have to pay for ½ the fee of the sessions missed that exceed the allowable limit or simply hold off scheduling any therapy until after the soccer season is over. However, as you know, we have a waiting list for after-school appointments and so the chances are slim that there will be an opening with his favorite therapist or on the day/time you desire, once the fall schedules are confirmed. Generally, from mid-June on, it is nearly impossible for us to find afternoon appointments for you, but we can put you on a waiting list. Unfortunately, we cannot "bend" the rules so that children can participate in other activities, such as sports, theater productions, etc, for periods of time and still reserve their therapy times unless the parent will honor the contract.

Q. My mother's flight was delayed and we were not able to get our child to his appointment or call to cancel. Since that was not our fault, it doesn't seem fair that we should have to pay for a session we did not have. Instead, I'd like to reschedule it and your front office is refusing and insisting I have to pay for it. This isn't fair and I gave your front office a piece of my mind about it!

A. We sympathize with your frustration in paying for a session your child did not attend. However, please do not holler at our front office staff –or refuse to pay for it. When you signed up your child at our practice, you signed a contract and were given our office policies. You are welcome to try to schedule an additional session for your child, but both the original session AND the rescheduled session would need to be paid for. *Additionally, parents who consistently treat our staff unkindly, refuse to pay for missed sessions, or are rude to the staff run the risk of having their child's program terminated.* While this is rare, it happens from time to time and it is not fair to our staff in the front office, as they have been left in tears on more than one occasion for this kind of situation. If you plan to have your child in our program, it is your responsibility to read the contract you are signing. If you do not intend to honor it, please do not enroll your child. It will save all of us headaches down the line.