

Many occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech-language pathology services that are funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development may be delivered by a therapist assistant,¹ under the supervision of an occupational therapist (OT), physiotherapist (PT) or speech-language pathologist (SLP).

Your child's OT, PT or SLP is responsible for conducting an assessment and developing an intervention plan, and may feel that certain parts of your child's intervention plan can be effectively delivered by a therapist assistant. The supervising OT, PT or SLP may only assign tasks to a therapist assistant that he/she feels the therapist assistant is competent to perform.

If you are considering using a therapist assistant as part of your child's intervention, the following questions and answers may be helpful.

Q: What are the potential benefits of having some of my child's services delivered by a therapist assistant?

A: A therapist assistant enhances the services provided by an OT, PT or SLP, and may be able to effectively support your child in meeting the goals of his/her therapeutic intervention. A therapist assistant may have more time to spend with your child than his/her OT, PT or SLP does, and will likely charge a lower hourly rate. As a result, the use of a therapist assistant may increase the frequency and/or amount of intervention available to your child, without increasing the cost.

Q: My child's OT, PT or SLP has recommended that a therapist assistant be used. What questions should I ask the therapist before deciding whether to use a therapist assistant?

A: You may wish to ask the following questions of your child's OT, PT or SLP:

- What tasks will be performed by the therapist assistant? How will this be documented and how will the tasks be changed, if necessary?
- What tasks will not be performed by the therapist assistant?
- How often will the effectiveness of the services that are delivered by the therapist assistant be evaluated?
- What relevant training/education does the therapist assistant have?
- Is the therapist assistant registered with a professional therapy association?
- Are you currently supervising other therapist assistants? What is the maximum number of therapist assistants that you will supervise at a given time?
- If the therapist assistant is providing services to my child and you are not in the same physical location as him/her, how will you make yourself available for immediate consultation, if necessary (e.g., by telephone, pager, email)?

¹ Therapist assistants may also be known as rehabilitation assistants, occupational therapist assistants, physiotherapist assistants, speech-language pathologist assistants and communication disorder assistants.

Q: Should consent be obtained before my child's services are delivered by a therapist assistant?

A: Yes. As regulated healthcare professionals, supervising OTs, PTs and SLPs must receive informed consent from the child's parent or legal guardian for the use of a therapist assistant. Your child's views on the use of a therapist assistant are also important and should be sought and considered, according to his/her age, maturity and evolving capacities. Under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), children and youth have a right to be involved in decision-making that affects them; this involvement promotes their development and well-being.

When seeking consent, your child's OT, PT or SLP will explain the personal information that may be shared with the therapist assistant, so that he/she can provide services appropriately. This information must only be shared and used in accordance with the relevant legislation, professional guidelines and agency policies.

You may revoke your consent at any time, by notifying the supervising OT, PT or SLP.

Q: What type of training/education do therapist assistants receive?

A: Although not required by law, a therapist assistant's employer may require that he/she have a Therapist Assistant certificate or diploma.

Those who have recently graduated from a public Therapist Assistant diploma program in British Columbia have been trained to work with children and youth. This typically includes training in the following areas:

- common childhood conditions;
- motor skill development;
- social, cognitive, visual-motor and perceptual development;
- basic handling and positioning techniques;
- augmentative communication;
- assistive technology; and,
- play activities to support therapy goals.

In addition, practicum placements are usually available for students who are interested in gaining experience with children and youth.

Q: Who is ultimately responsible when a therapist assistant is involved in delivering services to a child?

A: The OT, PT or SLP who supervises the therapist assistant is ultimately responsible. While therapist assistants are not regulated healthcare professionals, supervising OTs, PTs and SLPs are, and must abide by the following guidelines when supervising therapist assistants:

- College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia: [Assigning of Service Component to Unregulated Support Personnel](#)
- College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia: [Assignment of Task to a Physical Therapist Support Worker](#)
- Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists: [Position Paper on Support Personnel in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology](#)²

Q: What types of tasks can only be undertaken by an OT, PT or SLP?

A: The professional regulatory bodies of OTs, PTs and SLPs have guidelines on the tasks that only they can perform. These generally include the following:

- interpretation of referrals;
- assessments;
- provision of standardized tests;
- service planning; and,
- personal counselling.

Q: My child is receiving services from a therapist assistant and I have concerns about his/her professional conduct or the services being delivered. What should I do?

A: Discuss your concerns with the therapist assistant and, if necessary, the supervising OT, PT or SLP. If you have concerns about how the therapist assistant is supervised, which are not addressed through a discussion with the supervising OT, PT or SLP, you may wish to contact the relevant professional regulatory body. The following professional regulatory bodies have the authority to review and investigate complaints about the practices of their therapist members:

- [College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia](#)
- [College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia](#)
- [College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of British Columbia](#)

² Membership in the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists is voluntary. This position paper will be replaced with the relevant guideline of the [College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of British Columbia](#), when available.