

Roles of Related Service Providers

In the ASD Nest program, the “expert” is no *one* person, but rather the collaborative, multidisciplinary team made up of related service providers and educators. Together, these trained professionals work to facilitate Nest students’ access to the school experience. Related services are delivered in accordance with each students’ IEP. Planning meetings, in-class sessions, and weekly case conferences offer the opportunity for therapists to share their therapeutic expertise with their teams, guide interventions and supports, and better support the students in the ASD Nest program.

Speech & Language Pathologists (SLPs):

- According to the Department of Education, “*school-based speech and language services are designed to address deficits in a student’s auditory processing, articulation/phonological skills, comprehension and use of semantics, syntax, pragmatics, voice production and fluency*” (schools.nyc.gov).
- In the Nest program, in addition to individual and group therapy sessions, SLPs also lead the planning and implementation of Social Development Intervention (SDI) focus time in collaboration with Nest teachers. SLPs are responsible for turn-keying the SDI units to the Nest staff and for guiding and monitoring the completion of the GPS and SDI Team Planning Maps throughout the year.

Occupational Therapists:

According to the Department of Education, “*occupational therapy is designed to maintain, improve, or restore function of students in all educationally related activities including neuromusculoskeletal, motor, sensory and perceptual, cognitive, and psychosocial function. OT services emphasize independence in activities of daily living, skill acquisition, and school participation in various school settings*” (schools.nyc.gov).

- In the Nest program, in addition to their individual and group mandates, OTs may also participate in SDI at most once per week, as their schedule permits.
- OTs may also hold group sessions to deliver the Middle School OT Independence curriculum.

Social Workers/Guidance Counselors:

- School-based social workers and guidance counselors are the liaisons between the home and school. Individual and/or group school counseling sessions may also be provided as outlined on students’ IEPs.
- In the Nest program, the social worker/guidance counselor facilitates regular ASD Nest parent meetings and workshops and acts as a resource for Nest families.
- The social worker/guidance counselor facilitates communication between individual parents and the team which, in turn, helps the team understand each child through his/her parents’ eyes. This relationship is established at the home visit and continues with the social worker/guidance counselor presenting the parents’ concerns at team meetings.

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Additional Questions & Considerations:

How are related services provided to Nest students?

In the ASD Nest program, the classroom setting is the therapeutic environment. Therefore, as much as possible, related services are incorporated into the classroom as part of the every day school experience. Students in the ASD Nest program may also receive speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling services at school. These services are designed to address specific challenges to give students better access to school-based instruction. These services can be individual or group sessions, and can be delivered in a separate location or, whenever possible, in-class. Nest teachers and therapists make every effort to collaborate, to ensure that therapeutic and classroom supports are cohesive, complimentary, and consistent across all settings.

How do related service providers attend relevant case conferences?

If team meetings are divided by grade, related service providers' schedules may need to be aligned with the division of team meetings. For example, one SLP may need to work only with 6th grade students, so she can attend that grade's meeting. A second SLP would then be scheduled to work with 7th & 8th grade students, attending that group's meetings.

Who is responsible for communicating with parents?

In addition to Nest teachers' communication with their students' families, Nest social workers/guidance counselors are another key point of contact for Nest parents, serving as liaisons between the home and school program. Other related service providers may also communicate with parents. When a parent shares questions, concerns, or suggestions, these are communicated to the rest of team to inform team decisions about interventions and strategies.

Who participates in SDI?

SDI focus time is a group speech mandate on the IEP led by the speech and language pathologist in collaboration with a Nest teacher. The teacher in attendance is either the Nest Coach or a Nest teacher designated by the principal. When schedules and student group size permit, the occupational therapist may also participate. The strategies learned in SDI focus time are woven throughout the day to help students generalize across settings.

Whom to go to with questions:

ASD Nest professionals are members of a multidisciplinary team and can contact their:

- *Speech pathologist* if a student is struggling with a language, social, or pragmatics, such as being part of a group, processing classroom language, or negotiating with peers.
- *Occupational therapist* if the student is having sensory and/or self-regulation issues, such as attending on the rug, self-regulating during transitions, or with the physical aspects of writing.
- *Social worker/guidance counselor* if the student is having emotional difficulties, related to bullying, coping with anxiety, or dealing with their diagnosis.

Parents can bring their questions and concerns to any member of the team.

A note on the ASD Nest Model:

This paper outlines an element of the ASD Nest Model. Fidelity of implementation to the model is essential for program consistency. While a degree of flexibility is necessary given individual school needs, the program benefits from schools' commitment to a cohesive model.