

# Should I Open a Private Practice?

Callie Resource Library



## Should I Open a Private Practice? A Guide for SLPs



You're good at what you do. You've thought about going out on your own. Setting your own schedule, choosing your clients, building something that's yours. **But is private practice actually right for you?**

The decision isn't just about clinical skills. It's about financial readiness, lifestyle tradeoffs, and honest assessment of what you want from your career. **This guide walks through the real considerations so you can make your own decision.**

## "Side Hustle vs. Full-Time Private Practice"

**Private practice doesn't have to be all or nothing. Many SLPs start small and build from there.**

### The Side Hustle Approach

This is how many successful practice owners got their start. You keep your main job for stability and benefits while seeing 5-10 clients per week in the evenings or on weekends. You can build slowly without financial pressure, which often leads to better decision-making and less stress.

This might look like working your school or hospital job Monday through Friday, then seeing private clients Tuesday and Thursday evenings plus Saturday mornings. Your employed income covers your bills and gives you peace of mind. Your practice income can build your savings, pay down debt, or fund your eventual transition to full-time.

The benefits are **significant**. You're testing the waters without risking your financial stability. You get to learn whether you actually enjoy the business side of practice while still earning your regular paycheck. You can build a client base and referral relationships over time, so when you do go full-time, you're not starting from zero. Many SLPs find this gradual approach actually helps them build a stronger foundation than jumping in all at once.

The tradeoff is that you will be **working more hours overall**. Evenings and weekends that used to be yours are now booked with clients. The administrative work like notes, billing, and scheduling happens late at night or early in the morning. This pace is sustainable for a year or two, and for some people even longer, but most eventually want to transition to just the practice or scale back to a more balanced schedule.



## The Full-Time Leap

This is when you make your practice your **primary focus**. You have your own schedule, your own caseload, and your own rules. You are building income from zero (or close to it), but you have complete control and significantly more time to grow the practice.

The benefit is that you can focus all your energy on building your practice. You are available for daytime appointments, which many clients prefer and which can be easier to fill. You can take on clients immediately when referrals come in, rather than having to squeeze them into limited evening availability. You also have time during business hours to network, attend events, and build the relationships that will fill your schedule.

The challenge is that your income does start at zero. In month one, you might have three clients. By month three, maybe ten. It takes time to build, and you need savings to cover the gap between where you are and where you need to be.

## When Each Makes Sense

The **side hustle route** is ideal if you need your current income and benefits to feel financially secure, if you want to test whether you genuinely enjoy private practice before committing fully, or if you prefer a gradual transition with less financial risk. It is also a smart choice if you have family responsibilities or other commitments that make a dramatic career change feel overwhelming right now. Starting small lets you build confidence and skills while maintaining stability.

The **full-time route** makes sense if you have 3-6 months of expenses saved and feel comfortable with that cushion, if you have some referral sources already lined up or strong connections in your community, or if you are truly ready to commit fully to building something new. Some people know they want to dive in completely, and if that is you and you are financially prepared, this path can work beautifully.

**Neither approach is better than the other.** It depends entirely on your financial situation, your risk tolerance, and what else is going on in your life right now.



## Financial Readiness: The Real Numbers

**Here are the financial realities most SLPs face when starting a practice.**

### Before You Start

Most financial advisors recommend having **3-6 months of personal living expenses saved**. This covers your rent, groceries, car payment, and student loans while your practice income builds.

If your monthly expenses are \$3,000, that's \$9,000-18,000 in savings. If they're \$5,000, that's \$15,000-30,000. This is your runway.

Startup costs typically run \$2,000-5,000. This includes liability insurance (\$800-1,200 annually), practice management software (\$0-600 for the first year), website (\$500-2,000 for setup), initial marketing materials (\$200-500), and a buffer for unexpected costs.

Practice management software is one area where you can start at zero. **Callie's free starter plan includes AI notes, scheduling, payments, and client management. You can launch your practice without monthly software costs, then upgrade as your caseload grows.**

If you're leaving an employed position, calculate what you're losing in benefits. Health insurance through an employer might cost \$200/month. Through the marketplace or a private plan, it might cost \$400-600/month. That \$200-400/month difference matters when you're planning your budget.

## Income Expectations Timeline

Here's what a realistic build looks like:

<b>Months 1-3:</b>	Minimal income, around <b>\$500-1,500/month</b> . You're setting up systems and seeing your <b>first few clients</b> .
<b>Months 4-6:</b>	Part-time equivalent income of <b>\$2,000-4,000/month</b> . You're seeing <b>8-15 clients per week</b> consistently.
<b>Months 7-12:</b>	Approaching full-time income potential at <b>\$4,000-7,000/month</b> depending on your rates and hours.
<b>Year 2 and beyond:</b>	Many established solo practitioners earn <b>\$80,000-120,000+</b> annually with <b>full caseloads</b> .

These **estimates assume moderate private pay session rates (\$100-150/session) and steady growth**. Your actual timeline depends on your market, specialization, and how effectively you build referral relationships.

## The Runway Concept

How long can you operate before the practice needs to fully support you? Be honest. If you have six months of savings but a working partner whose income covers the basics, your runway is longer. If you're supporting yourself with no other income source, six months is your hard deadline.



Financial stress kills practices. Many SLPs give up just as their practice is about to turn the corner, not because the practice wasn't viable, but because they ran out of money first.

**Want to see how Callie can support your practice with free and low cost EHR practice management software? [CLICK HERE](#)**

# Private Practice vs. Employment: Real Pros and Cons

Let's compare honestly. Employment isn't all bad, and private practice isn't all good.

Employment: Schools, Hospitals, SNFs, Agencies	Private Practice
<p><b>The upside:</b> Predictable paycheck. Health insurance, retirement matching, paid time off. Professional development is often covered. Built-in referral system. Shared administrative burden. Colleagues for support and collaboration.</p> <p><b>The downside:</b> Your schedule is set for you. Caseload decisions made by others. Limited income growth potential. Documentation and policies you don't control. Someone else runs the business and controls your job security. No freedom to choose your patients. Capped financial upside</p>	<p><b>The upside:</b> Your schedule, your rules. Choose your clients and specializations. Higher income potential with a full schedule. Full control over treatment approaches. Build something that's yours. Hire others to work for you and become a manager.</p> <p><b>The downside:</b> No paycheck when you're sick or on vacation. You handle (or pay for) all admin tasks. Marketing and business development are your job. Financial risk and uncertainty. Benefits and taxes are entirely your responsibility.</p>

## The Hybrid Option

Here's something worth considering: part-time employment plus part-time private practice.

Work three days a week at a school or hospital. See private clients the other two days. You keep benefits, stability, and steady income from employed work while building autonomy and better rates through your practice.

This is particularly common among SLPs balancing family responsibilities, those who value the structure and colleagues that employment provides, or anyone who wants to test private practice without going all in.

## Common Myths and Misconceptions

“ **You need an MBA or business background.** ”

You don't! Most successful SLP practice owners learned as they went. You need to be willing to learn how to track income and expenses, market yourself, and set up compliant systems. But you can learn this. You learned speech-language pathology. You can learn to run a small business.

“ **Private practice is only for pediatric specialists in big cities.** ”

This could not be further from the truth. Successful SLP practices exist across specializations and locations. There are adult medical SLPs thriving in rural areas. There are voice specialists building full practices in mid-sized cities. There are AAC consultants working nationally via teletherapy. There are accent modification coaches serving professionals remotely from anywhere.

The key is matching your specialization to your market and being willing to think creatively about how you reach your ideal clients.

“ **You'll make way more money in private practice.** ”

The income potential is definitely higher, but the work required to get there is significant too. In your first year, you might make less than you did in your employed position. After 2-3 years with a full caseload, most practice owners do exceed their employed income, sometimes substantially, especially if they

market their practice to a place where they can hire more clinicians to work for them.

“ **It's too complicated/expensive/risky to start.** ”

Compared to most businesses, an SLP private practice has low startup costs. With a hybrid or part-time approach, the risk is also relatively low and many speech pathologists begin their practices with no debt.

To begin, you'll need a way to manage scheduling, documentation, and billing. All-in-one platforms can significantly help streamline setup where everything is in one place instead of juggling multiple tools. Callie offers a free starter plan that includes AI notes, scheduling, and basic billing so you can launch without monthly software costs.

“ **I have to be practicing as an SLP for at least 5 years before starting a private practice.** ”

There's no magic number. Some SLPs launch their practices within their first year after earning their CCCs. Others wait 10 or 15 years. Both can be successful.

What matters more than years of experience is whether you feel confident treating the population you want to serve. If you've been working with pediatric articulation for two years and want to specialize in that, you likely have the clinical foundation you need.

The business side is learnable regardless of how long you've been an SLP. Some experience helps, but there's no universal timeline.

## You Can Do This!



Starting a private practice is hard work, carries real risk, and may push you outside your clinical comfort zone.

It's also completely doable. SLPs with less business experience than you have built successful practices. SLPs in competitive markets have found their niche. SLPs who were terrified of the business side figured it out as they went.

The question isn't whether you're capable. You are. The question is whether you want to, and whether now is the right time.

Whatever you decide, decide from information, not fear.

**Ready to explore practice management options? See how Callie makes it simple. From AI notes to scheduling to billing, everything you need in one place. [START FREE](#)**

Callie