Social Pragmatic Language
Beyond Eye Contact

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I DON'T GET IT. WELLSF, AFTER THE BLACK WIDOW BITES DOLLY, THE FATHER SETS IT FREE, SAYING, "AT LEAST ONE WILL LIVE."

I STILL DON'T GET IT. WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I JUST EXPLAINED IT TO YOU!

I JUST DON'T THINK IT'S FUNNY, OK?!

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE TOUCHING!
What is Social Pragmatic Language?

Pragmatics involve three major communication skills:

• Using language
• Changing language
• Following Rules
Using language for different purposes, such as

- **Greetings** (e.g., hello, goodbye)
- **Informing** (e.g., I'm going to get a cookie)
- **Demanding** (e.g., Give me a cookie)
- **Promising** (e.g., I'm going to get you a cookie)
- **Requesting** (e.g., I would like a cookie, please)
Changing language according to the needs of a listener or situation, such as

- Talking differently to a baby than to an adult
- Giving background information to an unfamiliar listener
- Speaking differently in a classroom than on a playground
Following rules for conversations and storytelling, such as

• taking turns in conversation
• introducing topics of conversation
• staying on topic
• rephrasing when misunderstood
• how to use verbal and nonverbal signals
• how close to stand to someone when speaking
• how to use facial expressions and eye contact

These rules may vary across cultures and within cultures. It is important to understand the rules of your communication partner.
Following rules

An individual with pragmatic problems may:

- say inappropriate or unrelated things during conversations
- tell stories in a disorganized way
- have little variety in language use
It is not unusual for children to have pragmatic problems in only a few situations. However, if problems in social language use occur often and seem inappropriate considering the child's age, a pragmatic disorder may exist. Pragmatic disorders often coexist with other language problems such as vocabulary development or grammar. Pragmatic problems can lower social acceptance as peers may avoid having conversations with an individual with a pragmatic disorder.
Theory of Mind

Theory Of Mind (TOM) refers to persons ability to form representations of other people’s mental states, and to use these representations to understand, predict and judge utterances and behavior.
Who struggles with social pragmatic language?

A challenge for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Asperger Syndrome, ADHD, NLD and Others

*Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* indicates:

- People can score high on IQ and standardized tests and have quite limited social skills
- Methodologies are successful at teaching the ability to interact socially
- Social thinking strategies that have helped children and adolescents have also helped adults.
What is the impact of struggling with social pragmatic language skills?

- Feel different and do not feel okay about being different.
- Have trouble keeping up with the fast-paced social interactions of their peers due to processing or language delays.
- Have difficulty making and keeping friends due to emotional outbursts or meltdowns.
- Have issues with separation and independence.
- Misinterpret social cues of potential friends.
- Feel rejected by peers and don’t know why.
- Have difficulty sharing and taking turns.
- Are shy and unassertive and vulnerable to being picked on.
Social Thinking

- Social thinking is required before the development of social skills.
- Successful social thinkers consider points of view, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and intentions of others.
- We can determine the meanings behind the messages communicated by others and how to respond to them within milliseconds to three seconds!
- Social thinking occurs everywhere, when we talk, share space, walk down the street, even when we read a novel and relate to our pets.
- It is an intelligence that integrates information across home, work and community settings - something we usually take for granted!
Development of Social Thinking

- Social thinking is hard-wired at birth and learned intuitively from infancy onward.

- Most of us develop our communication skills as we grow up, steadily observing and acquiring social information and learning how to respond to the people around us.

- Difficulties with learning and applying social information is often considered a social learning disability.
Other issues to consider

- Sensory issues
- Language
- Intent
- Recognition of development of social competence as an ongoing process
- Recognition that choices and behaviors have consequences
- Opportunities to practice and generalize in different settings
- Perspective taking
- Flexible thinking – visual schedules, role play, categorization, multiple solutions to problems
- Self esteem
- Motivation
- Acceptance of mistakes, negative feedback
- “small talk” conversation starters, conversation maintenance
- Labeling, recognizing and expressing emotion
How social interactions build language

Language learning is both a social and a developmental process. To acquire a language, children must interact with other more competent language users as well as explore various aspects of the linguistic system. During the early years of language learning, children also create, test, and revise their hypotheses regarding the use of language.

Parents and early childhood educators should provide these young learners with developmentally appropriate language activities, offer opportunities for them to experiment with different aspects of language learning, and honor their creativity.
Early social language

PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The following conversational social language skills should be developed by the age of three years and continue to be reinforced as the child’s language matures.

- Requests for objects
- Requests for actions
- Assertion
- Denials
- Request for information
- Stated information
- Callings or Summons
Requests for objects

Identify situations during activities when the child wants or needs certain items. Also identify specific items in the situations which would be available to the child on request. For example, the task may involve the use of scissors. Instead of having them readily available, the child is told to cut paper in an activity but must ask for the materials.
Assertions

An assertion occurs when a child talks about an activity which he/she has completed in your presence or is in the process of completing. The child wants to confirm the main ideas or purposes of the activity. For example, after the class has participated in an activity, the teacher may ask the children to tell about what they made. Assertions are also helpful in reviewing the sequence of a task (e.g., What did we do first? Then what did we do?, etc.).
Requests for actions

- Identify certain situations where children must ask for assistance. For example, some children may need assistance opening glue bottles, writing their name, or cutting. Instead of anticipating those children which need assistance, wait for their request. Although you may know that one certain child needs help, wait for their request. Although you may know that one certain child always needs help, a general instruction for all the children to "Let me know if you need help!" may be enough to prompt the child to say, "Help me, please."
Denials

A denial should occur when the teacher says or does the opposite of what the child asks for or expects. For example, the child asks for some glue (a request for an object) and the teacher gives the child some scissors. The child should deny the response by saying, "That's not glue." or "I need glue, not scissors."
Request for information

A request for information can be staged by omitting information that the child needs to complete a task. For example, when giving directions regarding a new activity, give the child an extra piece for which you do not give instructions or have one unusual piece on your example so that children must ask "How?" questions to get enough information to complete the project.
Callings or Summons

Children should beckon a teacher or another child for assistance or to enlist their participation in an activity. The person must be a reasonable distance from the speaker but not directly attending to the speaker. For example, a child in a classroom may call a teacher's name when assistance is needed with an individual task in which he/she has been involved.
Stated information

Stating information is simply telling a person something new or not previously known to them. Situations of this type occur frequently in classrooms. The "show and tell" time or times when children are asked to take verbal messages to a parent or another teacher are common examples. For example, "Tell Mom what you made today."
Teaching social pragmatic language

- **Take advantage of naturally occurring situations** - practice greetings at the beginning of a day, have the individual ask peers what they want to eat for dinner or request necessary materials to complete an project.

- **Role-play conversations** - pretend to talk to different people in different situations, set up a situation in which the individual has to explain the same thing to different people, such as teaching the rules of a game, or how to make a cake.

- **Encourage the use of persuasion** - ask the person what he or she would say to convince family members to let him or her do something. Discuss different ways to present a message:
  - Polite ("Please may I go to the party?") versus impolite ("You better let me go")
  - Indirect ("That music is loud") versus direct ("Turn off the radio")
  - Discuss why some requests would be more persuasive than others.
Conversation and Storytelling

- **Comment on the topic** of conversation before introducing a new topic. Add related information to encourage talking more about a particular topic.

- **Provide visual cues** such as pictures, objects, or a story outline to help tell a story in sequence.

- **Encourage rephrasing** or revising an unclear word or sentence. Provide an appropriate revision by asking, "Did you mean .... ?"

- **Show how nonverbal signals are important** to communication. For example, talk about what happens when a facial expression does not match the emotion expressed in a verbal message (e.g., using angry words while smiling).
Perspective Taking with Stories and Books

- How does this character feel?
- Where is he going?
- What does he need?
- What is happening?
• *Miss Spider* by David Kirk
• *Miss Spider* by David Kirk
That afternoon Lilly went to the Lightbulb Lab.
She was still very sad.
She thought and she thought and she thought.
And then she became angry.
She thought and she thought and she thought some more.
And then she became furious.
She thought and she thought and she thought a bit longer.
And then she drew a picture of Mr. Slinger.
Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse
by Kevin Henkes

Lilly ran and skipped and hopped and flew all the way home, she was so happy.
And she really did want to be a teacher when she grew up.
Flexible Categorization

- Apple
- Banana
- Orange
- Apple
- Ball
- Rose
Key points when teaching social pragmatic language

- How their own social minds work - why they react and respond the way they do
- The behaviors that make others feel good and bad
- How these behaviors are affecting their own emotions, responses to and relationships with others across different social contexts
- Recognize the different levels of their own and others’ social minds
- Navigate behaviors while considering how others perceive and respond to them
- Adapt to the people and situations around them - even in casual settings (hanging out, etc.)
What are social language groups?

- Provide opportunity for direct instruction and then practice with target social pragmatic language skills with peers and professionals
- Can include opportunities for generalization into the community
- Can include participation with peers as role model
- Need to be assessed for appropriateness of group participation
What is generalization?

- Ability to practice use of skills across settings and within the student’s environment

- Ability to provide instruction/correction in target settings
Questions

- Remember...language is a journey and a process, not a straight, groomed path!