

Social Skills: Pragmatic Language Delay (Q&A)

Parents and their 7 year old son came into my office. The parents introduced their son to me. He said hello without looking at me. His eyes gazed all over my office, and he began to open my cabinets and look inside. When the parents left, we played a game and chatted. Abruptly, he spoke about a fast water ride that was really fun. I had no idea what he was talking about, but knew he made an association from something that had been said within the past 10 minutes. Most children who have pragmatic language delay (social language difficulties) state what comes to mind leaving the listener confused. Usually, the child has a reason it was brought to mind. It is my job to teach the child how to introduce the topic appropriately and maintain it, so his peers (and everyone) experience the flow of communication. In this case, I had told the boy that I took my son to a park over the weekend. I went on to discuss other aspects of the weekend when the boy blurted out about the fast water ride. We discovered his thought was triggered from my discussion of the park because he went to a water park (Oh!). Not so random of a thought after all! When I consulted with his parents, I told them that he had a pragmatic language delay (social language difficulties) including issues with eye contact, greetings, topic, and pleasantries (touching without asking, which usually makes his peers at school very angry). I have begun therapy with him and he is starting to understand these skills. He will make nice progress.

PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE SKILLS

Pragmatic Language is defined as the social use of language: Use Of Language & Communication Behaviors To Interact Effectively and Appropriately with Others.

Individuals diagnosed with Language delay, Auditory Processing Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, and Non Verbal Learning Disability display difficulties with many aspects of pragmatic language skills.

Delayed pragmatic skills need to be individually assessed and addressed. Various cues can be used to develop each skill. Repetition and consistency are the keys to obtaining social language goals.

PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE CHART

Answer Yes or No to the following:

TOPICS

Introduces topic clearly

Maintains topic across turns

Changes/shifts topic appropriately

Chooses appropriate topic for context

Responds with information on topic

TURN TAKING

Waits for a turn to speak

Uses pauses when speaking

Uses an appropriate amount of verbiage

Checks for listener understanding

Uses responses when listening

Restates what speaker said

Asks questions when listening

SPEECH FUNCTIONS

Convinces and persuades: no anger

Accepts peers' opinions: no anger

Offers and supports own opinions

Relays pertinent information

Gathers and requests information

Gets to the point

SPEECH PLEASANTRIES

Uses greetings and farewells

Uses thank you and apologies

Asks permission (asks not tells)

Asks for help

Receives and gives compliments

Uses phone skills appropriately

PEER LANGUAGE SKILLS

Asks to play appropriately

Expresses feelings

Joins in to play

Compromises/negotiates

Uses cooperative/associative play

Uses appropriate slang with peers

SPEECH STYLE

Uses appropriate volume

Uses appropriate prosody/tone

Uses formal or informal context

Comprehends humor/sarcasm

Uses appropriate response time

NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE

Uses eye contact

Uses appropriate proximity

Uses facial expressions

Understands facial and body gestures

Uses body language to enhance meaning

Minimizes distracting movements