JUST USE YOUR WORDS

Integrating Social Skills and Pragmatic Language Skills In Students with Autism

Lani Popp, MS, CCC-SLP
Victoria Sills, M Ed

Disorders that may have Social Skills or Pragmatic Language deficits

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Social Communication Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Emotional / Psychological Disorders
  - Anxiety, Bi-polar, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder, Depression
- Genetic Disorder
  - Down’s syndrome, Rhett Syndrome, Fragile X, Prader Willi Syndrome
- Brain Injury (Acquired or Traumatic)
  - Traumatic Brain Injury, Stroke, Epilepsy, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Other
  - Hyperlexia, Semantic Pragmatic Disorder, Nonverbal Learning Disorder, Auditory Processing Disorder, Selective Mutism
Pragmatic Language

Pragmatic language is the ability to use and subtly change language appropriately in social situations.

The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) states that pragmatic language involves THREE major skills:

1. **Using language** for different purposes
2. **Changing language** according to the needs of a listener or situation
3. **Following rules** for conversations and storytelling

Characteristics of Pragmatic Language Disorder

1. Difficulties using language for a purpose including greetings, informing, demanding, promising, requesting.
2. Inability to change or modify language including how one speaks to different audiences, providing context or background information, modifying or changing how you speak in different environments or situations.
3. Difficulties following rules for conversation or discourse including turn taking, topic maintenance, clarifying as needed, use of paralinguistics (nonverbals, tone of voice, facial expressions) proximity.
4. Lack of eye contact
5. Inferencing, Non–Literal and abstract language difficulties. Humor and sarcasm often impacted.
6. Inflexibility and difficulties with multiple interpretations in situations.
7. Difficulty using and interpreting Prosodic features of language–the nonverbal but vocal aspects of speech (pitch, intonation, stress, speed, volume) that contribute to meaning.
Behavioral Skills

- Behavioral skills are learned behavior that allow people to achieve social reinforcement.
- It is our goal to build self-esteem, self-control, respect for others, and a sense of responsibility for one’s own actions.

The social component of school is as important as the academic aspect!

Why do students misbehave in school?

- They want to test whether caregivers will enforce rules.
- They experience different sets of expectations between school and home.
- They do not understand the rules, or are held to expectations that are beyond their developmental levels.
- They want to assert themselves and their independence.
- They feel ill, bored, hungry or sleepy.
- They lack accurate information and prior experience.
- They have been previously “rewarded” for their misbehavior with adult attention.
- They copy the actions of their parents.

From www.lifehack.org
Characteristics of students with Behavior Difficulties

- Non compliant
- Argumentative
- Easy Frustrated
- Fearful/Anxiety
- Dishonest
- Rude
- Disrespectful
- Runners
- Explosive
- Defensive
- Aggressive—Physically or verbally

What the Speech Pathologist can teach the Behavior Specialist...and everyone else
Theory of the Mind

- Most people understand that I am thinking one thing and you may be thinking something else. Most people want to know what you are thinking and want you to know what they are thinking.
- Individuals with autism may believe you are thinking what they are thinking. They have no desire to try to figure out what you are thinking because they “already know it”. They don’t have to tell you their needs or thoughts because you should know them.

Hidden Vs Known RULES

- Known rules are verbalized or read
  - They have a degree of right/wrong, good/bad
  - They are “punishable” – time out, suspension, jail
- Hidden rules evolve through different “societies” –
  - Different hidden rules are different in different cultures (burping, personal space, volume, eye contact, use of personal names)
  - They are NOT usually verbalized
  - They are not usually punishable, but do have social consequences
“Expected “and “Unexpected“ Behaviors

Unexpected vs. Expected (NOT wrong and right or good and bad)

- Inflexibility – inability to discontinue or change activities
- Inappropriate space
- Blunt words
- Preoccupation with single-minded activity
- Poor sportsmanship
- Lack of topic maintenance
- Turn Taking/Interrupting
- Social acknowledgement/greetings/eye contact
- "Unfunny" humor

What the Behavior Specialist can teach the Speech Pathologist …and everyone else
THE CPI Verbal Escalation Continuum

- 1. Questioning
- 2. Refusal
- 3. Release
- 4. Intimidation
- 5. Tension

De-escalation Techniques

- Undivided Attention
- Be Nonjudgmental
- Focus on Feelings
- Allow Silence
- Clarify / Restate Messages
- Develop a Plan
- Use a Team Approach
- Use Positive Self-Talk
- Recognize Personal Limits
- Debrief
Why do students with autism need social skills training?

Pragmatic Language social skills model—Students who do not have appropriate joint attention or executive functioning may not notice nor will they imitate the rules others are modeling. They do not have pragmatic judgment to determine if a behavior is appropriate. Through direct instruction they can learn appropriate social skills. Without good social skills training, poor behaviors can develop as coping skills or manipulations.

Social/Emotional social skills model—Students who have difficulty controlling or interpreting emotions appropriately may also drop the important pragmatic language skills necessary to get appropriate interpretations from others or resolve conflict. Behavior or emotional disabilities may lead to poor pragmatics.

Which came first—the chicken or the egg?
Students with autism have inherently poor pragmatic social skills, **BUT**...

They can learn good behavioral skills through appropriate discipline, social skills training and behavior modification.

They can also learn poor behavioral skills through inadequate supervision, inconsistency, indulging negative behavior and **acquiescence**.

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**Acquiescence**—
Giving consent by keeping silent or by not making objections.

Are you acquiescing?
How Do We Work On Pragmatics and Social Skills (or Behavior) Together?

Choose students who have different social needs (some purely behavioral, some pragmatic, some mixed).
Include a student with mild behavior but working on articulation in conversational speech.
Include behavioral kids with no speech goals.
Divide lessons between you.
Both the SLP and behavior teacher are at every session (as much as possible)
One person teaches and the other supports behind the students (proximity control).
The extra teacher is allowed to add additional comments, but make sure you agree ahead of time, how much they can comment.
Don’t be afraid to be flexible with your curriculum (we have skipped entire sections after using them unsuccessfully for a few years and have added lesson when we had a TADA! Moment).
Spend more/less time on each section depending on the needs of your students (be even more flexible).
How to help your students identify “unexpected” behavior in a positive way

- Gravity Thinking/Starlight Thinking
- Poisonous Thought and Antidotes
- Exploding and Imploding Anger
- The Incredible Five Point Scale
- Superflex vs. Unthinkables
- Flexibility Obstacle Course
- Stacking Dolls—Babushka
- Ping Pong Communication

Special Strategies to improve Social Skills

- Behavior Modification
- Premack Principle
- Reward vs. Punishment—positive and negative consequences
- Social Stories
- Social Songs
- Tracking Station/Processing sheets
- Visualization
- Emotional Tool Box
- Force Field
- Scripts/ “I Statement”
Social skills programs that address behavior and pragmatic language

Social Skills Program for Preschool– Early Elem Students

- We Can Make It Better: A Strategy to Motivate and Engage Young Learners in Social Problem–Solving Through Flexible Stories
- The Incredible Flexible You™ Curriculum Set, Volume 1
- Pirates
- Preschool Social Language Therapy
- Second Step
Social Skills Program for Elementary Students

- Space Travelers
- SuperFlex...A Superhero Social Thinking Curriculum
- Social Language Training (Elementary)
- Worksheets! for Teaching Social Thinking and Related Skills *
- Think Social! A Social Thinking Curriculum for School–Age Students (2nd Printing) *

Social Skills Program for Secondary Students

- Social Thinking Worksheets for Tweens and Teens: Learning to Read In–Between the Social Lines
- Worksheets! for Teaching Social Thinking and Related Skills
- Think Social! A Social Thinking Curriculum for School–Age Students (2nd Printing)
- Social Language Training (Adolescent)
- A Three Element Social Skills Program–Instruction, Drama and technology
Social Skills Program with music and/or videos

- Social Skills and Pragmatics for Autism and related Needs – Tuned Into Learning (preK–Elem)
- Social Singing – Talking Tunes (upper Elem – High School)
- Socially Smart (upper Elem – High School)
- Preschool Playtime, My School Day and School and Rules by Social Skills Builders

Other Social Skills Programs

- Exploring Feelings by Dr Tony Attwood
- The Leader in Me by Stephen Covey
- Coach Wooden’s Pyramid of Success
- Eight Keys of Excellence/Quantum Learning
Important information for Parents and Educators

- Stay calm
- Don’t take it personal
- Don’t get pulled into power struggles
- Nobody can MAKE you mad
- Take a break for yourself
- Be consistent
- Don’t reward bad behavior
- Reward good behavior
- Remind yourself that you have one of the hardest jobs in the world, but you can do it!
- Don’t acquiesce by staying silent!

Resources

- Winner, Michelle Garcia (2005) Think Social! A Social Thinking Curriculum for School Age Children, San Jose, California: Social Thinking Publishing, Inc.
- Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI)