

## Social Communication

### *Pragmatics Skill Areas to Work on at Home*

The pragmatic language skills are the most abstract and complex of all language skills. Even when a child has age-appropriate vocabulary and syntax skills, she or he may not yet have learned how to use these skills in a socially appropriate manner for specific social purposes. Young children with typical hearing acquire these skills rapidly between 3 and 4 years of age and are able to use these pragmatic language skills using complex language. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing acquire these skills much more slowly even with targeted intervention strategies. Without mastery of these skills, children will encounter significant challenges with literacy, written communication, and abstract conversational communication.

The box of skills not mastered by 7 years is a quick list of what skills families and other caregivers should help the child do with age-appropriate language. Doing the following activities or focusing on the following skills will assist the child in becoming proficient in their use of social language. The activities are not in any particular order or developmental sequence so you can try any one at any time!

#### **1. Giving Directions**

Adults often work with young children on their understanding of directions but sometimes learning how to give directions is overlooked. Can the child explain the steps well enough so that another individual can successfully make something: a picture, a snowman, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or an arts and crafts activity? For example, when giving directions, the child needs to understand what is in the mind of the other individual who must learn a game or learn how to make something (assumptions about what the other person already knows). If the child has difficulty giving directions clearly, review his directions step-by-step, talking about what you as the listener do and do not know and then modeling how he could have explained the step. Help him be successful in his explanations, not only by using appropriate vocabulary, but by describing even the easy steps he may believe you already know.

#### **2. Making Something**

Children also need to learn the sequence of information that they need to tell someone else about how to make something. Even when the child understands the sequence and is capable of making the desired food item, arts and crafts project, or object, the child may be unable to explain to another how to do it. Children do not always understand what basic information is important for another person to know. Remember to teach sequence. For a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, if the child says "peanut butter" and omits specific instructions in the sequence, you can respond with absurdities such as, "Do I put it in my hand? Where's the bread?" You may need to help him identify each of the steps in the sequence. It is often helpful to have some kind of visual associated with each step in the sequence. For example, get out all of the ingredients and tools to make a sandwich. He can move the bag of bread to one side once the slices have been removed; pick up the knife that is now in front of him; spread the jelly and then move the jar to the side with the bread then finally spread the peanut butter. You could put the items back in the right sequence as you review with your child how well they did on their directions. The order may also be jumbled to demonstrate that the end result will not be correct. You could also teach the child the correct sequence with visual cues / written language: (1) get a banana, chocolate, and nuts, (2) peel the banana before cutting, (3) cut the banana, (4) dip the banana into the chocolate, (5) roll the chocolate-covered banana in nuts, (6) freeze the banana. Teaching requires redundancy and repetition. Make sure to let the child make mistakes. If it isn't in order, can the task be completed? Children need to learn that making things typically requires a specific order or sequence of events to accomplish the goal.

#### **3. Learning How to Play a Game**

At very young age levels, you may need to teach a child to give directions about how to play a simple game, such as Duck Duck Goose. First, the child must consider the number of steps. Children must sit in a circle. There is a chosen child, the goose. How is the child chosen? Does the child who suggests the game pick the chosen child? The chosen child walks around the outside of the circle. The child taps each child and says "duck" as he or she taps. The child must choose a child to be the goose. When a child is chosen as

#### **Items Not Mastered by Children with Hearing Loss by Age 7 Years**

- ▶ Provides information on request
- ▶ Repairs incomplete sentences
- ▶ Ends conversations
- ▶ Interjects
- ▶ Apologies
- ▶ Request clarification
- ▶ Makes promises
- ▶ Ask questions to problem solve
- ▶ Asks questions to make predictions
- ▶ Retells a story
- ▶ Tells 4-6 picture story in right order
- ▶ Creates original story
- ▶ Explains relationships between objects-action-situations
- ▶ Compares and contrasts

the goose, this child must get up quickly and run around the circle. The child who has chosen the child to be the goose also begins to run around the circle and whoever reaches the empty spot first and sits down, is no longer the goose. The chosen child who is the new goose must think about who he will choose. The child must not show by eye gaze or pointing or any other hint who the new goose will be. If the goose does indicate who he will choose too early, then he will beat the chosen child to the open spot and the chosen child becomes the new the goose. The child must keep a secret. This is an opportunity to teach what a secret is. You may start by asking "What's first? What's second? What's third?" If the child simply says, "tap, tap, tap," then you must indicate that there is some missing information. "What's missing? Hmm," you can then give some indication of the thinking process that should be used. It is important for the parent to teach the child the thought process: "Who should I pick? It's a secret. Don't tell anyone. Don't make eye contact, others will notice. Don't point at the child you pick. If the child knows that you have chosen him or her, he or she will be prepared to run around the circle and you may not get there first." You can also introduce an absurdity. "Can I pick the table? Why not? If I walk around the circle, I need to tap a person. If I tap a chair, the chair cannot get up and run around the circle to try to sit down in the open space first." This is an excellent opportunity for teaching games like Concentration, Candy Land, or card games to a sibling or a friend. Other games that can be described besides board games or card games are games with a ball, simple games like Duck Duck Goose, or games with teams.

#### **4. Teaching Perspective Taking**

It is important for children to learn how to understand what is in the minds of others. Teach "why" questions. Teach children how it makes them feel. Ask questions such as, "Does it make you feel angry? Sad? Or disappointed? Why are you upset? Are your feelings hurt? Which is better, Grab it or ask politely? If I take it from you, how does it feel?"

#### **5. Teach about Choices and What the Consequences Are for Each Choice**

With children who have high language skills, it is important to teach verbal mediation skills and the language appropriate for these pragmatic skills. What will happen if you choose this one? Why would that choice be best? For children with lower language skills, you may want to use pantomime and pictures.

#### **6. Playing 20 Questions**

Although children with typical hearing learn how to play the game 20 questions without having to learn the steps, children with hearing loss often need specific instructions. How do you select the question to be asked? Which type of question is better, "Is it a dog? Is it alive? Is it an animal?" When the question is answered, what should the child do with the answer? Does the child eliminate any possibilities? It is easiest to learn how to play the game if the options are limited? With pictures of the possible answers, after the question is answered, it is possible to eliminate some of the pictures. Can the child explain why these answers would be eliminated? The child should cross out the pictures of answers that cannot be the chosen one because of the answer given to the previous question. Then the child needs to look at the remaining pictures and formulate a question that will either provide the information about which one is the chosen answer or eliminate more of the potential answers. You may need to teach the child what questions might yield the best ability to eliminate answers. These questions are frequently category questions, such as "Is it alive?" or "Is it an animal?" The child must learn how to keep information in his or her head to use for formulating the next question. The child must understand how to categorize things. Categorization often begins with visual obvious characteristics, such as the color, "Is it white?" Or the size, "Is it big?" Or, "Is it alive?" Or, "How do animals move? Do they fly? Swim? Walk?"

#### **7. Recognizing a Falsehood**

To survive in this society, it is important that children understand the difference between truth and a lie. Children need to learn when they are being "tricked." They need to understand what it means to be gullible, so that social victimization can be prevented. Role-play can consist of pretending to be a trickster. Should I believe the trickster? Are there any clues provided about tricksters? What strategies can be used to determine whether something is true or something is a lie? How does the child know when to believe someone? A child cannot understand truth without understanding a lie.

#### **8. Persuasion**

Why is it important for children to learn how to be persuasive? What are some real life examples when the child may find it important to persuade someone? A child may want to know how to persuade his or her parents to allow them to do something or get something; permission to do a particular activity, go to a party, go to get ice cream, etc. A child may also want to persuade other children to let him or her play with them. What are some strategies that can be used? How can the child assess whether or not the strategy is successful?

### **9. *Telling a Story in Sequence***

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing often need to learn how to relate stories of events so that someone else can understand the story. Notebooks that go back and forth between school and home can include information about what events may be of importance to the child that occurred at home or after school. You can then ask the child to tell you information about what happened. Then it is possible to determine whether the child is capable of telling a story or event in a logical order with sufficient information for others to understand. You will also know if something significant or important occurred that day—so that if the child begins to talk about an event, you will be knowledgeable enough to help support the child in learning how to relate information to another person. Because you know the event, you are able to determine what information has been omitted or is incomplete. You will want to think about if there is understanding of cause and effect. Information about comparing and contrasting may also be important when relating the information. Storytelling should improve if parent(s) provide appropriate modeling with emphasis on the components omitted by the child.

### **10. *Defense in the Face of False Accusation***

Is the child able to use language that provides defense in the face of a false accusation? Does the child understand the situation sufficiently to identify what defense would prove his or her innocence? Statements (e.g., “He took the toy. I didn't take the toy. I didn't want the toy. I wasn't there. I don't have the toy. I didn't want the toy.”) that provide evidence that the accusation is false could include a variety of perspectives.

### **11. *Alternate Points of View***

Children often need to be explicitly taught how to think about predicting what is in the mind of another person. Children with hearing loss often think that what they know, others also know. They need to be taught that a person knows what they have experienced and if they have not had access to specific information, they will make mistakes. The child does not have to have the same point of view as another (e.g., “I like this book or song”). The child does not have to like the book or song (e.g., “He hates this book”). Questions that could stimulate thinking about alternative points of view could assist the child in thinking about another's perspective: “Why did you like this book? What was your favorite part? What is another student's favorite part? Does everyone like the book?”

### **12. *Revision of Unclear Message***

First the child must be able to identify when the message was unclear to another person. If they can identify miscommunication, then they can supply options. You should model for the child. If the child says, “boat,” you could question, “Do I want the boat? Do I want to eat the boat? Do you want to get on the boat? Is it a blue boat?”

### **13. *Ability to Answer Questions***

A response needs to be appropriate, not just a response. Imitation is not a response to a question. You need to model both correct and incorrect, or model an absurd response.

### **14. *Maintaining a Topic***

Sample questions might include “Tell me three things about what you did last night. What kind of things did you see? Hear? Can you picture that in your head? Can you picture what would happen in the restaurant? Can you picture what would happen in a store?”

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