



LET'S TALK

... FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

Pragmatic Language Tips

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There are several ways parents and teachers can help children use language appropriately in social situations. Social language use is known as pragmatics.

Some general suggestions are provided to help children develop skills in three major pragmatic areas. Although suggestions are geared primarily for preschool children, they can be modified for use with older children as well.

Desired Language Function	Suggested Question or Comment
Comment	"What did you do?" "Tell me about . . ."
Request	"Tell your friend. . ." "What do you want?"
Question	"Ask me . . ."

Use of Different Language Functions

Ask questions or make suggestions to help a child use language for different purposes:

- Take advantage of naturally occurring interactions to increase use of different language functions. For example, practice greetings at the beginning of a day; have children ask peers what they want to eat for snacks; have children request necessary materials to complete an art project.
- Respond to a child's intended message rather than correcting the pronunciation or grammar; but provide an appropriate model in your speech. For example, if a child says, "That's how it doesn't go," respond, "You're right. That's not how it goes."

Adaptive Language Use

- Role play conversations that might occur with different people in different situations. For example, set up a situation (or use one that occurs during the course of a day) in which a child has to explain the same thing to different people. For instance, a child might be asked to teach the rules of a new game to a younger child and to an adult. If the child's explanations are the same for each listener, model different language patterns for an adult and a child listener.
- Encourage use of effective persuasion. Ask children what they would say, for example, to convince their parents to let them do something. Discuss different ways to present a message: polite ("Please may I go to the party?") vs. impolite ("You better let me go."); indirect ("That music is loud.") vs. direct ("Turn off the radio.")
Discuss why some requests would be more persuasive than others.

Conversation and Narration Skills

- Comment on a child's topic of conversation before introducing a new topic.

Add related information. This will help a child say more about a particular topic.

- Provide visual prompts such as pictures, objects, or a story outline to help a child tell a story in sequence.
- Encourage a child to rephrase or revise 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.

Use of suggestions such as these will help foster appropriate pragmatic language skills with children who might otherwise be at a disadvantage during social interactions.

If you have concerns about your child's speech or language development, please contact an ASHA-certified speech-language pathologist. Go to ASHA's website at www.asha.org for information and referrals or call 800-638-8255.

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