

# the school years toolkit

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## Pragmatics or social communication skills

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet for strategies to help children who have difficulties with understanding and using social communication.

Pragmatics is the way we understand and use language and communication in social situations and can also be termed social interaction skills. This includes both non-verbal skills e.g. body language, facial expression, and verbal skills eg taking turns and appropriate conversation skills.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and not seen improvement after three to four months, please contact CYPIT.

### What you may see

In class, the child may:

- Make contributions that are unrelated to the topic
- Have limited understanding and use of facial expressions
- Understand language in a literal way, ie fail to “get” idioms, sarcasm etc
- Have speech that sounds more like an adult than their peers’, ie use overly mature vocabulary
- Read accurately without the underlying understanding
- Not use appropriate “speech codes”. For example, they may talk too casually to a teacher or in a formal way to their peers
- Launch into long monologues with limited awareness of the listener’s interest or needs
- Have difficulty with establishing and maintaining friendships. Peers may find them annoying or irritating
- Have rigid, inflexible opinions
- Rely on known routines and find change difficult
- Have obsessional interests and topics of conversation
- Have some difficulties in tasks involving inference, prediction and reasoning
- Have difficulty in appropriately starting, maintaining and ending conversations
- Lack imaginative play and language.

### Strategies and advice

- Provide visual support within the classroom to help the child’s understanding eg signs, symbols, real objects, work planning sheets.

## Section 5 **advice** sheets

- Provide and discuss a visual timetable every day. Prepare the pupil in advance for any possible changes to their usual routine.
- Keep language simple and sequential eg say “Put your books away, then go out to play”, rather than “Go out to play after you’ve put your books away”.
- Be aware that the pupil may not understand or respond appropriately to your body language, facial expression, tone of voice etc.
- Try to use literal language wherever possible and explain any use of abstract or non-literal language.
- Use Circle Time to help develop the child’s social skills and address difficult areas of communication.
- Give immediate and specific feedback on the appropriateness of the pupil’s communication, eg “Well done , you waited for your turn” or “We are talking about holidays now. You can tell us about Thomas the Tank Engine later”.
- Arrange for the child to have a talking time where they can choose the topic of conversation eg five minutes a day with a teaching assistant.
- Check the child’s comprehension of written material, including the vocabulary, and their ability to understand the sequence of events.
- Be aware that the pupil may need support during unstructured times eg play and lunch times. This could take the form of supported playground games or guided interaction with others.
- Model “Good Conversation” skills and make the unwritten rules of conversation explicit to the pupil.
- Use Social Stories to discuss changes to routines and possible communication breakdowns.
- Include the child in supported social skills groups.

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## Suggested Resources

- Talkabout, Talkabout Activities and Talkabout Relationships - Alex Kelly, Speechmark Publishing Ltd.
- Socially speaking – Schrober, Winslow Press.
- Social Use of Language Programme - NFER Nelson, Darville House, 2 Oxford Road East, Windsor, Berks., SL4 1DF (Tel: 01753 858961).
- Dealing with feelings; Emotional Literacy - Tina Rae Lucky Duck Publishing, 8 Thorndale Mews, Clifton, Bristol, BS8 2HX, Tel; 0117 973 2881.
- Think It, Say It - Winslow Press.
- New Social Stories - Carol Gary, Winslow Press.
- Writing and Developing Social Stories - Practical Intervention in Autism. C.Smith. Speechmark. Telford Rd, Bicester, Oxon., OX26 4L.
- Black Sheep press - Pragmatic/Semantic materials - 67 Middleton, Cowling, Keighly, W.Yorks. BD22 0DQ.
- Inferencing Cards LDA Duke St, Wisbech, Cambs., PE13 2AE, Tel: 01945 463 441.
- I Say - Margaret Valery. STASS Publications. 44 North Road, Ponteland, Northumberland, NE20 9UR.
- Social Skills Programmes. An integrated approach from early years to adolescence. Maureen

## Section 5 advice sheets

Aarons and Tessa Gittens. Speechmark Practical Therapy Manual.

- Developing Pupils' Social Communication Skills. P. Barrett et al. David Fulton Publishers. Ormond House, 26-27 Boswell St, London, WC1N 3JZ.
- Primary and Secondary Inclusion Developmental Programmes for Teaching and Supporting Pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Supporting pupils on the Autism Spectrum.
- Teacher Net – An interactive resource to support head teachers, leadership teams, teachers and support staff. [www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications).