

PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE

For children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the social aspect of language is often difficult and hard to learn. Pragmatics refers to the social communication and language skills we use in our day to day interactions. It encompasses the verbal and non-verbal means to communicate with other people. Non-verbal pragmatic communication includes the understanding and use of eye gaze, body language and facial expression.

Verbal pragmatic communication includes the ability to express our wants and needs, thoughts and ideas, and our feelings. Good pragmatic language is critical for successful social interaction. Children who have difficulty in using verbal and non-verbal pragmatic skills also have difficulty recognising and understanding other people's communication which often leads to confusion for the child.

Because pragmatic communication is difficult for children with Autism Spectrum disorder, they often have trouble following the rules of conversations such as turn-taking, staying on topic and showing interest in other people's conversations.

The following list will help you to identify some areas of pragmatic difficulty your child may be experiencing.

Child is **NOT** using gesture, vocalisations, behaviour or words to:

- Look at you when they want something
- Reach or point to something that he wants
- Reject or protest when he/she doesn't want something
- Greet people and/or communicate 'byebye'
- Indicate they need help
- Show you things they are interested in
- Approach you to engage in social games such as peek-a-boo, tickling games
- Let you know he/she needs comfort
- Tell you what he wants you to do – e.g. 'give ball', 'push swing'
- Draw your attention to something he wants you to notice – e.g. 'look plane'
- Ask questions, especially 'what, who and where questions
- Make comments – e.g. 'yukky, it's hot
- Requests permission – e.g. 'can I go'
- Express feelings and opinions
- Talk about a variety of topics
- Take turns in conversation

**** examples are based on average child development patterns, it is important to note that children will develop at different speeds, please use this as a broad reference and NOT a prescriptive measure.**

If you feel your child may benefit from assistance with the development of pragmatic language skills, please contact a speech pathologist for further support and advice.