



ACTIVITIES, ROUTINES AND GAMES TO DEVELOP PRAGMATICS

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 includes 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 ideas will help you to incorporate pragmatic language skills into everyday activities.

Mealtimes

- Offer choices of different foods
- Put foods in zip lock bags, clear see through containers to encourage the child to hand the container of food to be opened. This may also encourage the child to request the food item by its name eg. apple, or to request 'help' or 'open'
- Present some of the food but not all of it – this will encourage your child to indicate that they want more
- Put the food your child likes somewhere out of reach but in view to encourage them to reach for it, point to it, or look at you. Doing this creates a need for them to engage with you.
- Present food you know your child does not like and model 'no' or a 'head shake' to encourage more appropriate communication for rejecting things
- Model comments such as 'yummy' and 'yucky'

Playtimes

- Present your child with choices of toys that he can play with
- Play social games that involve anticipation and excitement such as peek-a-boo and tickles. Pause at different intervals and wait for your child to look and /or gesture or vocalise for more.
- Build towers with blocks. Take turns to add on the next block. Model language to your child as you play. For example 'mummy's turn, Jack's turn'.



Playtime continued..

- When playing with play dough, encourage your child to hand over the play dough container for you to open it. Instead of giving all the cutters to your child at once, encourage your child to point or reach for the ones he wants or request verbally. Model language describing what you are doing as you play. For example, 'mummy's rolling', 'Jack's squashing'.
- For more verbal children play games involving role play eg. shopping. encourage the child to request the items they want to buy and to be descriptive. eg. I want the small yellow car
- Provide your child with examples of language to use in social / play situations. For example, 'say ...'can I play?', 'tell daddy 'look at the ladybird I found'.
- When pushing your child on the swing and modelling the word 'push', 'go', after a few times hold the swing back and wait for them to say 'push' or 'go'.
- Introduce your child to lotto/memory games and simple board games or games with rules to develop turn-taking, language for commenting, requesting and asking questions and learning to play with peers.

Quiet time

- Allow your child to choose a DVD and bring it to you to indicate that they want to watch it.
- When reading to your child, sit your child in a bean bag or in a comfortable position opposite you to encourage looking at you and the pictures in the book. Encourage your child to point to pictures that you name. Model asking questions such as 'what's that?', 'where's the?'
- For more verbal children take turns to describe / talk about the pictures in the book.

Music for fun

For younger children and early communicators songs are repetitive and predictable in their words and actions and offer the opportunity for you both to take turns. Children learn to:

- Request and initiate songs by using a word, gesture or handing over an object or picture representing the song
- Anticipate where they need to insert a word or make a sound in the song
- Imitate actions in songs
- Follow instructions in the song

*** These are examples only and do not replace professional advice, if you have concerns about your child's communication skills, it is important to consult a speech pathologist*