

Building successful social relationships is a dynamic process. Social pragmatics consists of the ability to use and adapt language and is typically developed through a multitude of interactions with friends, family, and other communication partners. For people with complex communication needs (CCN), successful social communication frequently includes use of multiple communication modes and skilled communication partners who understand how to support conversational interactions.

There are a variety of complex processes underlying effective conversational turn taking. Reading partner cues, developing empathy, and integrating others' perspectives are critical to participation in social communication. Individuals with CCN may be at risk for weak pragmatic development because they frequently experience significant barriers to a variety of conversational experiences. Explicit instruction to learn effective pragmatics is an important component of AAC intervention. This presentation will focus on the underlying theories that support social pragmatics, potential barriers to the development of effective pragmatics for individuals using AAC, and the implementation of strategies for targeting the language skills necessary to engage in effective social communication.

AAC intervention typically focuses on teaching vocabulary, syntax, and conversational turn taking; however, there is a need to explicitly teach language in a social context. The capacity to communicate successfully in a social context is rooted in strong central coherence, development of theory of mind, and executive functioning management. These core components of social communication can be broken down into expressive and receptive language skills that need to be taught to AAC users using multiple communication modalities. By using these language skills in a social context, AAC users can develop mental models for use of language in conversational contexts.

There is a great deal of emerging and established research in the area of social pragmatics. Theory of Mind, Central Coherence Theory, and executive functioning have been established to play a role in the development of sophisticated pragmatics. These areas of research can be leveraged to support the communicative competence in children who have CCN. Strategies for AAC users and communication partners that are grounded in these foundational elements can promote rich interactions that serve as the basis for relationship building and social pragmatics.

Theory of Mind (ToM) can be defined as understanding that others have beliefs, desires, and perspectives different from one's own. ToM encompasses tracking what others know, taking perspectives, and integrating information for usage and adaptation of language in personal interactions. For AAC users, several aspects of conversation

may cause challenges to developing ToM. The time-bound nature of conversation, access to essential vocabulary, and lack of strategic competence may distract AAC users from integrating the communication partner's perspective. ToM can be prioritized in AAC interventions by teaching vocabulary that supports the expression of opinions. Experience asking questions that are individualized to communication partners and narrative development are also skills that support ToM.

Central coherence (CC) can be characterized by seeing "the big picture" and understanding the relationships between supporting details and the main idea. Weak CC may create a tendency to think in a segmented manner or create obstacles relating information back to a larger pattern. Also, CC is relevant to the non-social aspects of interactions, such as integrating information from multiple conversational turns to gain the gist of someone's message. AAC users who struggle with weak CC may have command over the linguistic aspects of communication but processing several aspects of conversation may prove challenging. Additionally, seeing the "big picture" in conversation and responding with appropriate social skills may be difficult for AAC users due to physical or sensory impairments that create obstacles to expressing and receiving salient information. CC can be supported by working on language skills such as learning categories, focusing on the main ideas and supporting details, and understanding relationships between two entities.

Executive functioning (EF) encompasses organization, judgment, flexibility, and problem solving. These inherent aspects of EF are necessary and used to efficiently monitor and make adjustments during conversation. Strong EF requires proficient working memory (WM). Effective WM capacity supports complex, non-linear interactions, and individuals who use AAC have demands on working memory which include managing elements of conversation that are not part of typical verbal conversations. These may include using auditory scanning, code switching between language systems, and other skills requiring strategic competence. Impulse control and gauging emotional responses in conversation is critical to having effective pragmatics. Teaching strategies to recognize appropriate emotional responses and offering alternatives to negative behaviors is important for AAC users and can be integrated into interventions that also focus on vocabulary, syntax, and knowledge building.

People with CCN experience individual and cumulative barriers to the development of strong social communication skills. Creating shared contexts and identifying meaningful communication partners can help facilitate these skills. Providing concrete strategies that address these obstacles and creating opportunities to exercise these skills can be prioritized by creating interventions within a social context. This presentation will

introduce participants to a definition of social pragmatics and illustrate the potential barriers that many AAC users face. Additionally, each underlying component of social communication will be characterized by the language skills that comprise each one, and strategies for teaching these language skills will be illustrated. Lastly, use of a needs assessment and the SETT framework will be introduced to help practitioners work with teams and families to broadly integrate social pragmatic skills.

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Program Planner/Instructional Personnel's Name: *Mira Shah*

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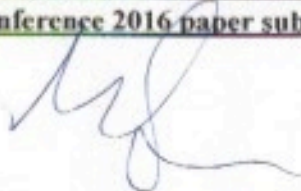
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Program Planner/Instructional Personnel's Name: Kristen N. Gray

Course Title:

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Signature Kristen N. Gray

Date 10/14/2015