Beyond “Please” & “Thank you”: The importance of teaching social skills to children who use AAC.

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Social pragmatics is an important component of communication.

Complex processes: reading partner cues, developing empathy, and integrating others’ perspectives

Explicit instruction: people with CCN frequently have limited communication opportunities
Weave pragmatics strategies into global AAC interventions
(As a bonus, it is also a good way to teach expressive language.)
This talk will focus on theories underlying pragmatics instruction and how they can be adapted for AAC users who are learning language.
Pragmatics (ASHA, 2014)

- Using language
- Adapting language
- Following rules
Using Language for different purposes

Requesting: “I would like a cookie, please.”

Informing: “I'm going to get a cookie.”

Promising: “I'm going to get you a cookie.”

Demanding: “Give me a cookie!”
Adapting language to the listener or context

Talking differently to different people

Establishing shared knowledge base

Speaking differently in different environments
Following Rules for Conversation and Storytelling

Taking turns in conversation

Introducing topics of conversation

Staying on topic

Rephrasing when misunderstood

Using verbal and nonverbal signals
Following Rules for Conversation and Storytelling

Standing the appropriate distance from someone when speaking

Using facial expressions and eye contact

Joining an established conversation
Limited opportunities to communicate

Limited communication partners

Limited vocabulary for social communication
Barriers to Strong Pragmatics

AAC systems malfunction

Time constraints on communication

System doesn’t authentically communicate intentions

Partners may not understand the message
Facilitators for Pragmatics

A wide variety of vocabulary
Facilitators for Pragmatics

Trained communication partners:

- Understand how the AAC system works
- Understand good pragmatics for communicating with someone who uses AAC

**ABOUT ME**
- My name is Christopher
- I live in Hayward, CA.
- I'm 12.
- I have a dog named Lola.
- I like baseball & computers.
- I use a DynaVox to help me talk.
- I'm in the 7th grade at Canyon M.S.
- I live with my mom, dad and sister.
- I had a great holiday break.
- I like warm weather best.
- I like to dance.

**ABOUT YOU**
- What's your name?
- Where do you live?
- How old are you?
- Do you have pets?
- What are your hobbies?
- How do you talk?
- How do you like about school?
- Tell me about your family.
- Tell me about your holidays.
- What musical instrument do you like to play?
- How's the weather?
- Do you like to dance?
Facilitators for Pragmatics

A variety of ways to establish social communication

Photos * Videos * Links * Stored Messages * Appropriate voice
Teaching Social Communication

Generating language is not enough

Build relationships

Social motivation

Concrete strategies
Example: Think. Know. Guess.

Understanding about others’ motivations
Foundation of strong social communication

Central Coherence

Theory of Mind

Strong executive functioning
Central Coherence Theory

“The big picture”

Thinking about the parts

Relating information
Barriers to Strong Central Coherence

- Lack of exposure to narratives
- Lack of conversation about narratives
- Lack of illustration of part whole relationships
- Lack of access to vocabulary necessary to talk about relationships
Strategies For Strong Central Coherence

Teaching categories

Illustrating relationships

Modeling answers to “why” questions

Introducing core words that can be used to connect ideas
Theory of Mind (ToM)

- Tracking what others know
- Thinking across personal interactions
- Using language to inquire about another person’s interests
- Reflecting on interactions and then monitoring our personal responses
Barriers to Establishing ToM

Lack of opportunities to reflect or express opinions

Lack of question asking opportunities

Lack of opportunity to brainstorm about the likes and interests friends and family

Lack of opportunity to assign attributes: funny, talented, mean…
Strategies to Support ToM

Create schemas

Reflection on others’ feelings or motivations

Vocabulary about the interests others
Executive Functioning

Organization
Good judgment
Flexibility
Reorganization
Problem solving
Examples of Poor Executive Functioning

- Impulsivity
- Perseveration
- Difficulty planning actions
- Difficulty regulating emotions
Supporting Executive Functioning

Making a plan

Visual supports

Practicing strategies
Social Communication Strategies

Recognizing:

Presence of another person

Individuality of another person

Another person has his or her own person set of emotions

Another person has his or her own set of desires and motives
Social Communication Strategies

Developing concepts:

- Another’s potential actions
- Another’s personality
- Desire to learn about others
- And using memory
Social Communication Strategies

Inquiring about another person’s interests

Understanding social conventions

Staying aware communication partner


Thank you!

If you have questions or would like to talk further about this topic, please contact:

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