

Social communication skills

Being able to understand and use language in a social situation is an important skill to develop. This is known as pragmatics and includes the use of non-verbal language as well as spoken language. It also involves verbal reasoning skills such as: prediction, inference and problem solving.

Children and young people who have difficulty with this may:

- Have difficulty making and keeping friends
- Rely on routine and find change difficult
- Have favourite topics of conversation
- Introduce unrelated topics of conversation in to discussions or lessons
- Find it difficult to make inferences, to predict or to reason
- Have difficulty using the context to support their understanding
- Have difficulty using and understanding facial expressions and non-verbal messages, including facial expressions
- Lack imaginative play
- Have difficulty participating in conversations, finding it difficult to start, finish and maintain them
- Use an inappropriate style of talking, e.g. talking to a teacher like a peer rather than using a more formal style
- Find it difficult to understand humour, sarcasm, idioms etc as they understand language literally
- Read fluently but not understand what has been read

Everyday strategies

- Use visual support within the classroom to support the child/young person's understanding
- Use a visual timetable daily.
- Make sure you prepare the child / young person for any planned change.
- Be aware that the child may not understand facial expressions/tone of voice etc
- Check that any reading material has been fully understood
- Make sure you are able to give specific feedback about the child/young person's communication
- Be aware of non-literal language such as idioms, jokes and sarcasm as the child may interpret these literally (e.g. butterflies in my stomach).
- Explain any non-literal language as this arises.
- Avoid questions such as "Shall we...", "Can you..." or "Do you want to..." as this implies a choice (e.g. "Shall we tidy up now?" Instead say "We're going to tidy up" or "Can you close the window?" Instead say "Close the window").

Activities

Sequencing

Sequencing skills need to be developed before a child can make a prediction about what might happen next. In order for a child to learn how to sequence ideas they first have to experience an event and then practise sequencing it in pictures e.g. baking cakes, making a cup of tea, brushing your teeth

Prediction (thinking about what might happen next or be said next)

- Ask “what do you think might happen next?” questions. For example, ask the child what might happen next in a storybook or television programme
- See if the child can describe the day’s weather and use this information to make predictions, for example, “It’s raining, what will happen at playtime?” (i.e., indoor play instead of outside play)

Inference (information that has been assumed but not explicitly stated)

- Ask “why?” and “how do you know that?” questions and initially model the correct response. For example, ask “why do we put ice cream in the freezer?” (so it doesn’t melt) or “how do you know you need to wear your wellies?” (it’s raining and/or there’s puddles/ mud outside)
- Observe people within the school/wider environment or look at pictures. Talk about how the person may feel and explain why