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Social-Pragmatic Language Group Treatment for Adolescents with Language Impairments and Psychiatric Diagnoses, presented in partnership with Cincinnati Children’s

Presenters:  Adam Diggs, MA., CCC-SLP  
Christine Lackey, MS., CCC-SLP, BCSCL

Moderated by:  
Amy Hansen, M.A., CCC-SLP, Managing Editor, SpeechPathology.com

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Social-Pragmatic Language Group Treatment for Adolescents with Language Impairments and Psychiatric Diagnoses.

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Learner Outcomes:
After this course, participants will be able to:

• Determine two essential components of Social Communication as indicated by ASHA's Practice Portal

• Identify three classifications of Social Skills Deficits

• Recognize five components of positive characteristics of a group facilitator

• Define the key components of a Social-Communication Group lesson plan
Other Related SpeechPathology.com Presentations

Third in a series of presentations for SLP’s working with children and adolescents with social-emotional-behavioral disorders in all settings.

- What Does Speech-Language Pathology Have to do with Mental Health? Considerations for SLPs Working with Children and Adolescents with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, presented in partnership with Cincinnati Children’s Course # 7685
- Behavioral Strategies and Considerations for Working with Children and Adolescents with Emotional-Behavioral Difficulties and Psychiatric Diagnoses, presented in partnership with Cincinnati Children’s Course # 7757

Social Communication Disorders

ASHA Practice Portal: Social Communication Disorders in School Age Children

Social communication can be defined as “the synergistic emergence of social interaction, social cognition, pragmatics (verbal and nonverbal), and receptive and expressive language processing” (Adams, 2005, p. 182).

Social Interaction: social competence with peers, code switching, cultural and gender influences, conflict resolution, etc.

Social Cognition: Theory of Mind, emotional comprehension regulation and expression, executive functioning and inference, etc.

ASHA Practice Portal: COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
Social-Pragmatic Language Impairment

Social Competence→ the ability to establish and maintain successful social relationships, gain peer acceptance, initiate and maintain friendships and to terminate negative relationships. (Gresham et al., 2001)

Students with ADHD, significant learning disabilities, cognitive impairments and emotional disturbances will have difficulty with social competence. (Gresham et al., 2001)

Social-Pragmatic Language Impairment

Social Skills vs. Social Competence

- **Social skills** are specific behaviors that an individual uses to perform competently on social tasks in social situations. These behaviors can be taught, learned and performed.

- **Social competence** - outcome-based, evaluative term. A judgment from an individual that a student has followed certain criteria to perform competently in a social interaction.
Social Skills Classification

**Classification of Deficits** “helps to link assessment results to intervention” (Gresham)

**Acquisition Deficits**: absence of knowledge for performing a skill. (“can’t do” deficits)

**Performance Deficits**: Patient has the knowledge about the skill, but fails to perform the skill when needed in a social situation. (“don’t do” deficits)

**Fluency Deficits**: lack of exposure to skilled models of a social behavior, inconsistent practice or delivery of a skill.

(Gresham et al., 2001)

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**Expansion of the Model of Deficits** (1990 Gresham and Elliot)

Added **Competing Problem Behaviors** to include the following:

- **Internalizing Problems** - anxiety, depression and social withdrawal
- **Externalizing Problems** - aggression, disruption and impulsivity.

(Gresham et al., 2001)
Matching Treatment to the Type of Social Skill Deficit

- **Promoting Skill Acquisition** → modeling, coaching, behavioral rehearsal, performance feedback in a small structured group.
- **Enhancing Skill Performance** → occurs in naturalistic settings following peer initiation, peer tutoring or incidental teaching. Followed by positive reinforcement.
- **Fluency Performance** → behavioral rehearsal and performance feedback. Small group or naturalistic settings. (Gresham et al., 2001)

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**Removing Competing Problem Behaviors**

- **Provide Behavioral Supports** (distractions, prompting, proximity, caring gesture, reduce the level of difficulty, change task)
- **Replacement Behaviors** are identified and applied in social situations.

**Generalization and Maintenance** → little mention of generalization and maintenance of Social Skills Training in studies

- Failure to program for generalization
- Weak social skill treatments
- Decontextualizing social behaviors
- The presence of competing problem behaviors.

(Gresham et al., 2001)
What is the Connection Between Emotion and Language?

**IDEA 2004: Definition of Emotional Disturbance:**

An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; and the expression of inappropriate behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general, pervasive mood of depression or a tendency to develop fears associated with school or personal problems; includes schizophrenia.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004)**

- SLPs should avoid applying a criteria of discrepancies between cognitive abilities and communication functioning, chronological age, or diagnosis in making decisions on eligibility for services.
- In the schools, children and adolescents with social communication disorders are eligible for speech-language pathology services, due to the pervasive nature of the social communication impairment, regardless of cognitive abilities or performance on standardized testing of formal language skills.

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**Language and Emotion**

- Language serves a socio-emotional function which involves expressing affective states and developing relationships.
  
  (Prizant and Wetherby, 1990)

- Expressing emotions plays an important role in behavior regulation, social interaction and communicative exchanges.
  
  (Prizant and Wetherby, 1990)
Language and Emotion

- “Understanding and correcting deficiencies of language can improve behavior and help a child to resolve at least some of his emotional dilemmas.” (Gualtieri et al., 1983)

- Treatment targeting social language, vocabulary, and communicative competence can assist teens in modifying externalized behaviors by providing the language needed to deal with strong emotions and to promote successful relationships. (Greene & Ablon, 2006)

Social Pragmatic Language and Behavior

Associations between Language Deficits & Problem Behavior

1. Language difficulties can lead to frustration and anger resulting in increased problems with social behavior and interaction skills.

2. Behavioral problems, like inattention and hyperactivity, may contribute to language and literacy problems.

3. Both language and behavioral difficulties co-exist and reciprocally influence each other.

4. The two conditions share an underlying deficit that may explain the association between language and behavioral problems.

(Hartas, 2012)
Social Pragmatic Language and Behavior

- Researchers found that two-thirds of their sample of children with conduct disorder had pragmatic language impairments.
- Pragmatic language deficits occurred in about two-thirds of a sample of children with antisocial behavior. (Gilmour, Hill, Place, and Skuse, 2004)
- In adolescence, demands on language competence increase and language skills become even more crucial for establishing and maintaining social relationships.
- Inadequate communication may cause misunderstandings, increase conflicts and deteriorate the quality of friendships, leaving children and adolescents at risk of stress, loneliness, and mental health problems. (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2010; Leonard et al., 2011)

Social-Pragmatic Language Skills

- Pragmatics is an area of language that is highly vulnerable in children with behavioral problems.
- Language, emotional and peer problems at 7-9 years of age were strongly correlated with pragmatic language impairments in adolescence. (Helland, 2014)
- Meta-analytic reviews of literature show that about 65% of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders will improve when given social skills interventions. (Gresham, 2015)
Social-Pragmatic Language and Learning in the Classroom.

- **Socially competent behavior** provides the essential basis for learning that allows students to benefit from classroom instruction (DiPerma & Elliott, 2002; Elliott & Gresham, 2007)

- Research demonstrates that students who have positive social interactions and relationships with their peers are more academically engaged and have higher levels of academic achievement (Wentzel, 2009).

What do I Address in Treatment?

- Speech and language objectives for students with language and emotional problems should focus on semantic deficits especially in the area of expression of emotions, listening skills, pragmatic language skills, and the language of the academic classroom. (Gidden, 1991)

- **Social competence** is more than understanding the social intents of others and using the appropriate social skills, but also, it is the ability to respond in an empathetic way to build relationships with others. (Hummel & Prizant, 1993)

- Speech-language pathologists must view language, communication and socio-emotional development as one entity in treatment.
The Importance of Pragmatic Language Groups From a Doctor’s Perspective

Constructs of Treatment

- It is important that treatment address the development of relationships with peers and adults as well as language strategies to deal with difficult interactions. (Hummel & Prizant, 1993)
- Pragmatic language treatment should provide opportunities for specific feedback, incidental teaching and generalization of skills to the home, school or hospital environment. (Gresham et al. 2001)
- A cognitive behavioral approach (CBT) to pragmatic language treatment supports the theoretical framework of other disciplines such as occupational therapy and mental health staff programming. CBT is a psychotherapeutic approach that aims to solve problems concerning dysfunctional emotions, behaviors and cognitions through a goal-oriented, systematic procedure.
Constructs of Treatment

- Use a facilitative approach: Explore the student’s behavior to determine the underlying communicative intent. Provide models using words to express feelings and resolve conflicts.

- In order to develop and maintain relationships, the student needs to be involved in situations where he/she is familiar and competent. ("hands-on", relevant activities)

- Explicit demonstration of the value of recognizing and correcting mistakes (address low frustration tolerance)

- Allow for increasing self-esteem and self-confidence as a communicator.

  (Hummel & Prizant, 1993)

HELP! How Can We Connect with Teenagers?

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Structure of the Communication Group

- **Icebreaker**: To introduce the communication topic, to provide an opportunity for peer interaction, to peak the teen’s interest and to promote verbal expression.
- **Discussion**: Thought provoking questions to guide the adolescents in identifying the relevance of the communication topic in their lives; analysis of components of a skill; personal experiences or examples.
- **Performance Activities**: Interactive games to target use of a skill; application of the communication skill in role plays, guided conversation activities or social skill evaluations
- **Journal**: Self-evaluation and personal goal setting
- **Generalization**: Challenge Sheet to document the use of the skill and to evaluate its outcome. Unit staff monitors.

Tips for Facilitator Preparation

- Communicate warmth, sincerity and respect to the participants
- Redirect comments and questions to the SLP back to the group participants to promote involvement.
- Look for opportunities to highlight shared experiences among peers in order to increase group connectedness.
- If a behavior issue arises in the group, the issue can be addressed with a group “rule” or individually. The second facilitator can assist a group participant who is struggling with attention, negativity or arousal.
- Be aware of personal communication strengths and weaknesses.
- Find opportunities to provide positive verbal reinforcement.

Communication Group Goal:

To provide supports and strategies to help you to communicate effectively with the people in your life in order to strengthen those relationships.

Respectful Communication Guide for Group Members

- **Using polite words:** *please, thank you, excuse me...*
- Responding with polite words when someone calls your name or asks you a question.
- **Provide Feedback when you don’t wish to respond...**
  - Ask to speak with the person privately.
  - Ask to talk about it at a different time.
  - Say, “I’m sorry, but I don’t feel like talking right now.”
- **“Check” your emotions.** You may have feelings of anger about something that happened to you earlier in the day. It is not right to take those feelings out on people that were not involved. Use a coping skill to reduce stress or ask to “take a break” from group.
- Choose your words carefully to avoid insulting another person.
- **Treat others as you want to be treated.**
Avoid: Provide Motivating Games

- Bean Bag Toss
- Game Shows
- Magnetic Darts
- Group Challenges
- Large Magnetic Dice
- Drawing Activities
- Inflatable Target with ping pong balls

Communication Group Topics

- Goal Setting
- Values
- Self-Esteem
- Non-verbal Communication
- Listening
- Attention to Details
- Giving Feedback
- Taking Perspectives
- Expressing Emotions
- Empathy
Communication Group Topics

- Passive/Aggressive/Assertive Communication Styles
- Respect
- Tactful Communication
- Tolerance
- Dealing with Frustration
- Responding to “No”
- Humor
- Building Relationships
- Problem Solving
- Negotiation/Compromise

Getting the Group Started

- Peak the Teen’s Interest
Icebreakers: Active, Enticing, Humorous

- Visual supports (humor; images; diagram)
- Props: (battery operated toys; foam/inflatable objects; puzzles)
- Construction Games
- Deductive Puzzles
- Leader Role Plays
- Guess the Topic Phrase
- Group Problem Solving Games

Communication Group Lessons

Each communication topic is divided into two lessons

Lesson 1: Introduce the Communication Concept and Skill
  > Provide handout to summarize key points
  > Present relevance of the skill to the teen’s life
  > Begin practice with the skill in social scenarios

Lesson 2: Reinforce the social communication skill
  > Provide additional details or strategies for the topic in the discussion segment.
  > Address ways to individualize the skill
  > Application of the communication skill through role plays, guided conversation activities or social skill evaluations.

Generalization is planned through a patient evaluation sheet and monitoring of the targeted skill by unit staff.
Suggestions From a Beginning Clinician

Interactions with children often require patience. When a child is engaging in negative behaviors, address your own emotions before addressing the behavior:

Ask yourself 4 questions
1. “What am I feeling now?”
2. “What does this young person feel, need, or want?”
3. “How is the environment affecting the young person?”
4. “How do I best respond?”

Behavior support techniques can be employed to mitigate negative behaviors before they get out-of-hand:

- **Manage the Environment** – take the abilities and triggers of participants into consideration when selecting activities and group arrangement.
- **Prompting** – giving verbal or nonverbal indicators and reminders of expectations and coming events.
- **Hurdle Help** – helping a child who is becoming overwhelmed by group expectations overcome a roadblock so that they may continue with the rest of the task.

- **Redirection and Distraction** – turning the child’s attention away from an undesirable behavior or action by changing to a more desirable or less stimulating activity.
- **Proximity** – just moving closer to a child can help them feel supported and be calming without singling out the child.
- **Time Away** – asking the child to go to a quiet area so that they may get away from a specific stimulus and quiet their emotions.
Behavior Management

Behavior support techniques can be employed to mitigate negative behaviors before they get out-of-hand:

- **Caring Gestures** – a “shot of affection” which indicates that you care about the child even when they are being difficult. This can take the form of a caring comment or a pat on the back or arm, or may take the form of asking that child to explain something that they are interested in.

- **Directive Statement** – telling the child specifically what is expected when the level of stress causes a child’s ability to make rational decisions to decrease. This is more intrusive than prompting and redirecting.


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Encouraging Critical Thinking With the Socratic Method

- Socratic method requires instructors to give up their conventional job of delivering content and try to get learners involved with the materials.

- There are no ultimate answers for questions raised. Questions are to inspire reflection.

- Socratic discussion helps individuals differentiate rational viewpoints from unreasonable ones.

- Socratic discussion guides learners to make novel discoveries through questions that are not restricted to assessment of student knowledge, but builds new stages of thinking.

Encouraging Critical Thinking With the Socratic Method

- Use questions that are analytical to probe reasoning and comprehension.
- Questions can be classified into six types:
  1. **Clarity** – individual is required to elaborate.
  2. **Precision** – participant is asked to provide more details.
  3. **Accuracy** – argue the trustworthiness of viewpoints and beliefs.
  4. **Relevance** – try to make sure that all considerations used in addressing thoughts are relevant to it.
  5. **Depth** – determine whether the questions involve complexities that must be considered.
  6. **Breadth** – ensure that all possible viewpoints are taken into account and leave no perspective unconsidered.


Socratic questions sound like:

1. **Clarity** – “Can you give some examples?”
2. **Precision** – “Can you be more specific?”
3. **Accuracy** – “How can we ensure that it is true?” “Does this come from a reliable source?”
4. **Relevance** – “Please explain how these ideas are connected?”
5. **Depth** – “Is this question hard to answer?” “What makes this questions difficult?”
6. **Breadth** – “What viewpoints are related to this idea?” “What opinions/ideas have been overlooked?”

Encouraging Critical Thinking With the Socratic Method

- Individuals with pragmatic language deficits have difficulty determining appropriate actions and making inferences in social situations.
- Many children admitted to the psychiatric units at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center are experiencing family conflict at the time of crisis, and identify expressing emotions as an area of needed pragmatic development.
- Chorzempa, B. R., Lapidus, L. (2009), indicate that after involvement in Socratic discussions students “felt more comfortable sharing their ideas, and encouraging one another to think out of the box.”

Tips for Leading Discussions With Teens

- Monitor your nonverbal communication in the same manner that you encourage your clients to.
- Have a plan, but be flexible.
- Allow teens to participate at their comfort level.
- Actively participate in discussions.
- When sharing anecdotes, keep them brief.
Tips for Leading Discussions With Teens (continued)

- **Recognize that you can learn from group discussions.**
- Don’t engage in the “kids today have it so easy” rhetoric.
- **Capitalize on opportunities to interact with group participants during other activities to “grease-the-wheels.”**
- Be attentive to the group participants to anticipate necessary modifications.

Lesson Examples: Emotions

- **Icebreaker:**
  1. Patient given Emoticon Card to describe.
  2. Group participants guess the emotion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Furious</th>
<th>Pleased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Describing Emotions**

1. Eyes
2. Eyebrows
3. Mouth
4. Facial Tension (Tight or Loose)
5. Intensity (Strong or Weak emotion)
Emotion Vocabulary Activity

- Complete the hierarchy
  Use words from the choice box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Choice Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Let down”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irritated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annoyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“go off”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disappointed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emotion Vocabulary Challenge

- Divide group members into pairs
- Give 2-3 minutes to complete the grid.
- Review group responses and provide a point for each unique word.
- Prize for winning team
Emotions Journal

**Emotion Vocabulary**
Write two synonyms for the feeling in each situation. Do not use happy, sad or mad. How did you feel?

1. You forgot a study appointment with a teacher.
   a. b. 
2. You got an extra twenty dollars for doing a job for a neighbor.
   a. b. 
3. Your friend did not invite you to a graduation party.
   a. b. 
4. You wanted to get an “A” on your project, but only received a “C”.
   a. b. 

---

**Generalization:**  
*Just Do It!*

**Apply Your Skills**
“USE it, or LOSE it.”

“Ready, action!” SKILL: __________________________

I used _________ (skill) with ________________________(Who?)

**Evaluation:**
What happened? __________________________________________
Was the outcome positive or negative? _______________________
What can you do to make the communication successful? _______
Expressing Emotions: Lesson 2 Application

Icebreaker: Images

- What emotion does the image evoke? Why?
- Relate a personal experience

Cookies & Milk
Birthday Party
Spider

Expressing Emotions 2: Activity

- Magnetic Dice Questions

Your parent doesn’t let you give your opinion.
Your parent doesn’t allow you to ask questions.
Your brother/sister takes your things.
Your parent decides how you spend your money.

Roll the dice. Tell how you would express your emotion in the situation.
Expressing Emotions 2: Discussion

Why: Other people cannot tell EXACTLY how we are feeling just by looking at us.
Your parents may get a sense of how you are feeling by watching your actions during the day. They make "guesses" about how you might be feeling.
Your parents cannot see your thoughts and interactions with friends.

How: Use an "I" Statement

"I feel ______ because ________________.
I need or want ________________________.
"

"I" Statements help you ...
> make your feelings clear to others.
> feel that others might understand your situation.
> to tell others what you want from them.
> to make your situation better by opening the lines of communication.

Expressing Emotions: Guided Role Plays

Magnetic Darts

• Practice using paraphrased "I" statements
• Specific Feedback: Taking perspectives; word choice; including feeling word; reason and need.
• Model "I" statements: “I felt______ when ______. I want ____.”

Somebody ate the last doughnut!

Your team lost the soccer game. You felt like your teammates were not even trying to win.
### Emotions Journal 2

#### Rating Scale for Anger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Looks Like (outside: face/body)</th>
<th>Feels Like (inside)</th>
<th>I can try to... (action to calm down)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Communicating in Conflict

**Icebreaker:**

What animal BEST matches your emotional response when in a conflict? Why?
Discussion:

Styles of Responding to Conflict

Healthy Conflict Resolution Skills

Communicating in Conflict: Activity

Pass out a card to a pair of students.

Ask the students to:

1. Define the communication skill or behavior.
2. Give an example of how the skill could be used in a conflict.

Be Flexible  Stay on Topic
Stay Calm    Listen
Be Open Minded
Give Suggestions
Think: What Does the other person want or need?
Ask for Ideas

Dealing with Conflict

Styles of Dealing with Conflict:
- Avoid or deny the conflict.
- "Blow off" rather than struggle through the conflict.
- Blame the other person since you are angry.
- Compromise and hope to win the disagreement.
- Appearance of compromise but manipulate to win more ground.
- Reach a fair solution through discussion and listening.

Put a check beside the style(s) of dealing with conflict that YOU use.

Healthy Conflict Resolution:
- The problem is asked by both people in the disagreement.
- The solution is NOT finding the best deal for ONE person. It is finding the best solution for ALL.
- Focus on the other person’s need as well as your own. If you always win the argument, you will cause hurt feelings and resentment from others.
- Be sensitive to keep your needs in consideration (don’t just give in to make the other person happy)

Common Mistakes:
1. Not discussing how to resolve the conflict
2. Not being flexible. You must focus on getting your own way.
3. Forgetting that there are many ways to solve a problem. You must open your mind to the other person’s ideas, too.
4. Focusing too much on what you can lose in the situation instead of what you both can gain.
5. Believing the other person must have done something wrong.
6. Bringing other issues into the disagreement before solving the main problem.
Communicating in Conflict

Responding in Conflict: Role-Play Scenarios

Situation: You did not finish your chores. You said you would do them yesterday. How could you respond?

Situation: You were to help finish a school project, but you forgot the work at home. How could you best respond?

Communicating in Conflict Journal

Communicating to Resolve CONFLICT

Communicating to Resolve CONFLICT cont.

1. Think about what you need now.

2. Take the perspective of the other person. What do they need now?

3. List 4 possible solutions to the problem. Think about the consequences.

4. What can I do to show respect for the other person in this conflict?

5. What are some positive thoughts I can have about the other person?

6. Using respectful language, write one way to begin the conversation.

7. How will this conflict affect my relationship with this person?

8. How can I improve this relationship? Why should I repair it?
Resource List

American Speech-language-Hearing Association


Resources (continued)

- Briton, B., Robinson, L., & Fujiki, M. (2004). Description of a program for social language intervention: “If you can have a conversation, you can have a relationship.” Language Speech and Hearing Services in the Schools, 35, 283-290.
Resources (continued)


Workbooks:


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