

Introduction to Social Pragmatic Language Disorders

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Overview

- This presentation defines social pragmatic language impairment, explains the referral process for assessment and intervention of pragmatic language deficits, cites select assessment instruments sensitive to detection of social pragmatic language impairment as well as explains the advantages and disadvantages of social pragmatic assessment and intervention in school vs. private therapy settings.
- Please note that product is also an introduction to several comprehensive presentations such as “[Assessing Social Pragmatic Skills of School Aged Children](#)” available [HERE](#), as well as “[Assessing Social Skills in Children with Psychiatric Disturbances](#)” available [HERE](#), both of which explain how to assess social pragmatic language skills of language impaired school aged children with and without psychiatric diagnoses.

Learning Objectives

- At the end of this presentations learners will be able to
 - Explain the symptoms of social pragmatic language deficits
 - Describe the roles of speech language pathologist (SLP) in the assessment and remediation of social pragmatic language disorders
 - Identify assessment instruments sensitive to detection of social pragmatic language deficits
 - Explain the advantages and disadvantages of social pragmatic assessment and intervention in school vs. private therapy settings

Intended Audience

- Parents
- Caregivers
- Speech Language Pathologists
 - Graduate Students
 - New Graduates
 - Clinical Fellows
 - Change of Career Professionals
- Related Professionals
 - Psychologists
 - Social Workers
 - Occupational Therapists
 - Special Education Teachers

Social Pragmatic Language Disorder (SPLD)

- In 1983, Rapin and Allen described a syndrome of language impairment termed ‘semantic–pragmatic deficit syndrome’
 - Children with this disorder were described as being overly verbose, having poor turn–taking skills, poor discourse and narrative skills as well as having difficulty with topic initiation, maintenance and termination.
- Over the years the diagnostic label has changed several times
 - Currently -“Pragmatic Language Impairment” (Bishop, 2000)
- Other terms used by professionals
 - Social pragmatic language
 - Social competence
 - Social skills
 - Social Thinking (Winner)

Role of SLP in Assessment of SPLD

- Language disorder involves impaired comprehension, expression and /or use of spoken, written or other symbol systems
- May involve deficits in
 - Language content (vocabulary/ semantics)
 - Language form (grammar/ syntax) and/ or
 - Language function (pragmatics)
- To assess deficits SLPs need to use
 - Static or dynamic assessments & include **valid and reliable** (must assess social pragmatic language and not just general language skills) standardized or non-standardized measures
 - <http://www.asha.org/docs/html/RP1993-00208.html>

Social Pragmatic Language Abilities

- Ability to appropriately use language
 - Persuade, request, inform, reject
- Change language
 - Speak differently to different audiences
 - Provide background information to unfamiliar listeners
 - Speak differently in different settings
- Follow conversational rules
 - Take turns
 - Introduce topics
 - Rephrase sentences
 - Maintain appropriate physical distance during conversational exchanges
 - Use facial expressions and eye contact
- Culminates into the child's general ability to appropriately interact with others in a variety of settings

Difference between strengths and deficits

- Social Pragmatic Skills
 - “The ability to adapt your behavior effectively based on the situation and what you know about the people in the situation for them to react and respond to you in the manner you had hoped.” (Winner, 2011)
- Social Pragmatic Deficits
 - Inappropriate/off-topic comments during conversations
 - Telling stories in a disorganized way
 - Trouble socially interacting with peers
 - Difficulty making and keeping friends
 - Difficulty understanding rejection by peers
 - Increased risk for bullying

Social Pragmatic Deficits (cont)

- Difficulty with initiate social interactions (Prizant & Meyer, 1993)
 - Asking questions
 - Obtaining help
 - Initiating academic work
- Attend to & interpret social cues (Langton et al, 2000)
 - Non-verbal body language, tone of voice vs. meaning, etc
- Difficulty with abstract thinking skills
 - Interpretation of abstract texts, double meanings of messages, etc
- Difficulty with perspective taking (Baron-Cohen, 1995)
 - Understanding that others have different thoughts, beliefs and ideas from them
- Difficulty with gestalt processing (Brosnan et al 2004)
 - Seeing the whole picture/message vs. focusing on details only
- Difficulty understanding and using humor (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010)

Difficulty with Deficits Detection

- Not all the children with pragmatic language impairment show poor reading comprehension, low vocabulary, and grammar errors
- Pragmatic language impairment is diagnosed as one of the primary difficulties in children on autistic spectrum **but is can manifest with other diagnoses**
 - Psychiatric
 - Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
 - Auditory Processing Disorder
 - Nonverbal Learning Disability

Difficulty with Deficits Detection (cont)

- Due to complicated constellation of symptoms and frequent coexistence with other disorders, social pragmatic language impairment requires multidisciplinary team involvement
- Standardized testing sensitivity issues with language assessments
 - Tests of communication, typically focus on semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology, as these are the performance areas in which specific skill development can be most objectively measured (Hill & Coufal, 2005)
- Yield average scores yet child has significant social pragmatic impairments so supplemental testing is **NEEDED**

Initiating the referral process

- Consult neurologist/psychiatrist to confirm/rule out serious medical/psychiatric diagnoses
- Consult speech language pathologist to confirm the presence of social pragmatic language impairment and to determine whether any other linguistically based deficits coexist with it
- For Parents of School Aged Children
 - Consult with the classroom teacher
 - Compile list of difficulties/ inappropriate behaviors
 - Determine whether the “red flags” merit further attention
 - Ask for a school speech language pathology referral to confirm the presence and/or severity of the impairment via language testing

Select assessments sensitive to SPLD

- Children's Communication Checklist-2 (CCC-2)
- Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals –Metalinguistics (CELF-M)
- Executive Functions Test-Elementary (EFT-E)
- Test of Pragmatic Language-2 (TOPL-2)
- Social Emotional Evaluation (SEE)
- Social Language Development Test -Elementary (SLDT-E)
- Social Language Development Test -Adolescent (SLDT-A)
- Test of Problem Solving-3 Elementary (TOPS-3)
- Test of Problem Solving -2 Adolescent (TOPS-2)
- Listening Comprehension Test Adolescent (LCT-A)
- The Social Thinking Dynamic Assessment Protocol (Non- standardized)

When to go private for evaluation and therapy ?

- The process of obtaining appropriate social pragmatic assessment in a schools is often fraught with numerous difficulties
- Lack of knowledge/training
- Lack of appropriate up-to-date social pragmatic language tests
- Lack of time to administer comprehensive assessment
 - Need 2-3 different assessment instruments (e.g., 2.5+ hours) to create a comprehensive social pragmatic profile for the child.
- Special education qualification rules are different from state to state or even from one school district to the next
 - Some districts strictly stipulate that the child's performance on testing must be 1.5-2 Standard Deviations (SD) below the norm to qualify for therapy services
- But what if the norms are average?
- What if informal assessment is needed?
- What happens if the child is “not impaired enough” (e.g., scored 1 SD below vs. 1.5 SD)?

Advantages of Private Therapy

- Parents can be present during the evaluation and therapy sessions
 - Allows to understand the extent of the child's impairment
 - Learn valuable techniques and strategies they can utilize at home to facilitate carryover and skill generalization
- Receive individual therapy services in contrast to school based services with groups as large as 4-5 children per session
 - Before a skill can be generalized it needs to be taught!
 - Most children with pragmatic language impairment first need individual sessions (e.g., may need drills to learn a specific skill)
 - Once the necessary skills are taught, only then can children be placed into social groups where they can practice generalization
- Private therapy allows for use of typical peers (friends) and/or sibling tutors to help facilitate the generalization of the desired skill more naturally

Advantages of Private Therapy (cont)

- Some private clinics are exclusively devoted to teaching social pragmatic skills and offer a variety of therapeutic services that target the improvement of social pragmatic communication
 - Individual therapy
 - Group therapy
 - Summer camps
- Parents may be seeking a specific social skills curriculum for their child which may not be offered by their child's school
 - “Socially Speaking” (Penina Rybak)
 - “Social Thinking” (Michelle Garcia Winner)
 - “Social Skills Training Project” (Jed Baker)

Conclusion

- Professionals
 - Need to use multiple assessment tools to create a balanced assessments
 - Assessments need to be functional and determine strengths not just weaknesses
 - Descriptive measures should be used along with standard scores
 - Average language scores on common tests may mask the presence of pervasive social pragmatic deficits
 - Assessments must yield diagnostic information needed to formulate treatment goals
- Parents
 - There are several routes open to pursue when it comes to pragmatic language assessment and intervention but the first step in this process is education!
- Visit the ASHA website to learn more
 - <http://www.asha.org/slp/PragLangDis/>

Helpful Resource Bundles

- [The Checklists Bundle](#)
- [General Assessment and Treatment Start Up Bundle](#)
- [Multicultural Assessment Bundle](#)
- [Narrative Assessment and Treatment Bundle](#)
- [Introduction to Prevalent Disorders Bundle](#)
- [Social Pragmatic Assessment and Treatment Bundle](#)
- [Psychiatric Disorders Bundle](#)
- [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Assessment and Treatment Bundle](#)

Helpful Resources

- [Assessment Checklist for Preschool Aged Children](#)
- [Assessment Checklist for School Aged Children](#)
- [Speech Language Assessment Checklist for Adolescents](#)
- [Differential Diagnosis of ADHD in Speech Language Pathology](#)
- [Creating Functional Therapy Plan](#)
- [Selecting Clinical Materials for Pediatric Therapy](#)
- [Social Pragmatic Deficits Checklist for Preschool Children](#)
- [Social Pragmatic Deficits Checklist for School Aged Children](#)
- [Auditory Processing Deficits Checklist for School Aged Children](#)

More Helpful Resources

- [The Role of Frontal Lobe in Speech and Language Functions](#)
- [Executive Function Impairments and At Risk Pediatric Populations](#)
- [Behavior Management Strategies for Speech Language Pathologists](#)
- [Narrative Assessment of Preschool and School Aged Children](#)
- [Treatment of Social Pragmatic Deficits in School Aged Children](#)
- [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder An Overview of Deficits](#)
- [Speech Language Assessment and Treatment of Children with Alcohol Related Disorders](#)

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