



# Hancock County Autism Team



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## SOCIAL LANGUAGE, IT AIN'T JUST ABOUT GRAMMAR

**Social language**...what is it, and how do we deal with it in the schools? A student may say words clearly, and use long, complex sentences with correct grammar, but still have a communication problem, if he or she has not mastered the rules for social language known as **pragmatics**.

**Pragmatics involves three major communication skills:**

**1. Using language** for different purposes, such as:

- greeting (e.g., hello, goodbye).
- informing (e.g., I'm going to get a cookie).
- demanding (e.g., give me a cookie).
- promising (e.g., I'm going to get you a cookie).
- requesting (e.g., I would like a cookie, please).



**2. Changing language** according to the needs of a listener or situation, such as:

- talking differently to a baby than to an adult.
- giving background information to an unfamiliar listener.
- speaking differently in a classroom than on a playground.

**3. Following rules** for conversations and storytelling, such as:

- taking turns in conversation.
- introducing topics of conversation.
- staying on topic.
- rephrasing when misunderstood.
- how to use verbal and nonverbal signals.
- how close to stand to someone when speaking.
- how to use facial expressions and eye contact.



**These rules may vary across cultures and within cultures. It is important to understand the rules of your communication partner.**

**An individual with pragmatic problems may:**

- say inappropriate or unrelated things during conversations.
- tell stories in a disorganized way.
- have little variety in language use.

It is not unusual for children to have pragmatic problems in only a few situations. However, if problems in social language use occur often and seem inappropriate considering the child's age, a pragmatic disorder may exist. Pragmatic disorders often coexist with other language problems such as vocabulary development or grammar. Pragmatic problems can lower social acceptance. Peers may avoid having conversations with an individual with a pragmatic disorder.

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Our goal is to address  
the pyramid of needs of students with autism.

## SOCIAL LANGUAGE continued

Learning, teaching, and modeling these skills can be very difficult, exhausting, and frustrating. However, there are many strategies that can easily be incorporated into the classroom and at home. One type of strategy is to use short stories that demonstrate the correct social behavior expected for that student. These can be adapted for non-readers and readers alike.

Carol Gray is the developer of *Social Stories™*, which describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. The goal of a *Social Story™* is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience. Half of all *Social Stories™* developed should affirm something that an individual does well. Although the goal of a *Story™* should never be to change the individual's behavior, that individual's improved understanding of events and expectations may lead to more effective responses. She has a YouTube video describing how to use *Social Stories™* from her website: [www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories](http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories).



Another type of visual for social interaction model is the use of power cards. "Power Cards" help a student learn routines and expected behaviors through visual aids and stories. A student may have a special interest, such as a superhero, TV personality or cartoon character, and this can be used to motivate and pique the students' interest so that they can perform and/or behave in different scenarios and environments as expected by all students in the school.



Read more: [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_7539678\\_make-power-cards.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_7539678_make-power-cards.html)



These are just 2 different types of strategies for addressing social interactions/behavior teaching. There are many other resources out there of which several are listed below:

*The Gray Center: for social learning and understanding* Our vision is to assist all individuals in the shared challenge of building and maintaining effective social connections. [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org)

<http://suite101.com/a/free-social-story-templates-a329350> Teachers and parents can use social story templates in order to teach their children with autism about appropriate social skills and behavior.

<http://filefolderheaven.com> was created by a Special Education teacher, for teachers, parents, and all people working with Autism and other disabilities. (go to Categories: Autism Tasks: Free Behavior Support)

[www.speakingofspeech.com](http://www.speakingofspeech.com) (select Materials Exchange: Social/Pragmatics)



The Autism Tool Kit has great items for use in your classroom. This 6-drawer storage cart holds materials and supplies. Some of the items available are:

*Fitball wedge cushion* for kids who have a hard time sitting in a traditional classroom chair.

*Slant board* to help with directionality difficulties and reduce eye and head movement demands.

*Weighted Shoulder Snake* effective in helping to calm and focus the nervous system

*Focusing Fidget Kit* contains a variety of materials to assist children in calming, focusing and finger strengthening.

Check with your building principal or an intervention specialist to locate a tool kit in your school for use in your classroom.

## Resources

Parent Mentor Library:  
Many books available to check out, and support from the Parent Mentor, Laurie Betscher. Call 419-422-7525 ext 105.

Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence:  
[www.ocali.org](http://www.ocali.org)

Autism Society of Northwest Ohio:  
[www.asno.org](http://www.asno.org)

