



## HOW AUTISM AFFECTS PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE

Autism spectrum disorder is a disorder that affects speech and language development, social skills, and other areas of development. Pragmatic language (or social communication) refers to the way in which people use language for different purposes, change language based on the situation, and follow rules of language in social contexts.



Many children with autism struggle with social interactions and relating to others, so conversational speech may not come naturally for them. To help children with autism build pragmatic language skills, parents, therapists, teachers, and other caregivers can model language. Modeling can occur in a wide range of activities such as play, daily routines, story time, and more. In addition to modeling by adults, children with autism often benefit from social interactions with peers in a group setting.

Some children with autism may also benefit from the support of a speech-language pathologist. During a speech therapy evaluation, the speech-language pathologist will assess the full scope of a child's pragmatic language including strengths and areas of concern. With this information, the speech therapist will develop an individualized plan of care to target the most significant aspects of pragmatic language.

There are many fun activities to help children with autism improve pragmatic language skills including social stories, singing songs, reading stories, and practicing scenarios in social settings (e.g., asking your friend to share a toy that you want to play with).

**References** – Paul, D., & Murray, D. (n.d.). What is Social Communication Disorder? How Is It Treated? [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/04/03/what-social-communication-disorder-how-it-treated>



## PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE DISORDERS

Language is a pivotal aspect of daily life that affects many areas including social interactions, relationships, learning, and more. As children develop and begin engaging with peers and caregivers, social interactions become increasingly important. However, these skills are not easily acquired by all children, particularly those who experience a pragmatic language disorder.

### What is pragmatic language?

Pragmatic language refers to the ways individuals use language for social means such as holding a conversation, making a request, or providing information. Pragmatics also includes the rules that govern social interactions such as using appropriate greetings, staying on topic during conversation, providing an adequate amount of information, holding eye contact, and more. There are three main categories which include language usage (e.g., making a request), language changes (e.g., adjusting language to fit a particular context), and rules of communication (e.g., turn-taking) (American Speech-Hearing-Language Association).

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# ASK A THERAPIST



## WHY ARE 'WH' QUESTIONS IMPORTANT?

*Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?*

Chances are you have used asked at least one of these questions today. While you may not consciously think about the importance of these 'WH' questions, they are a highly significant skill for children to develop in early childhood. As children grow and explore their environments, questions are an essential way to learn about the world.

By incorporating 'WH' questions in routines at home, you can help your child build functional language skills, increase expressive and receptive language, and enhance social communication with adults and peers. When children begin school, asking and answering questions is a critical way to acquire new skills and knowledge.

As you practice at home, you can start with basic questions as your child begins to acquire this skill such as "What is this?" while holding up a picture of a dog. Once your child becomes increasingly familiar with the prompts and expectations for 'WH' questions, you can increase the level of difficulty of the tasks such as "Why is he wearing a coat?" With this task, the expectation is for your child would respond with something along of the lines of "because it is cold outside."

If your child uses augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) (e.g., a picture exchange system or iPad) you can still practice 'WH' questions! When you ask a 'WH' question, your child can respond with their AAC device, and your child can also begin asking you 'WH' questions with their AAC. In fact, there are many apps for 'WH' questions.

## APP OF THE MONTH: Practicing Pragmatics Fun Deck



**Ages** 3+

**Target Skills**  
Education

### About The App

This app helps child build crucial social communication skills while having fun!



## Pragmatic Language Disorders Continued...

### Pragmatic language disorders

Children with a pragmatic language disorder (also referred to as social communication disorder) may experience challenges with social interactions in one or more key areas. It is important to note that a disorder means a child consistently exhibits difficulties in these areas. Typically developing children may break these pragmatic "rules" from time to time as they learn appropriate language skills, however, if those behaviors are a regular occurrence, it may be a sign of a pragmatic language disorder (American Speech-Hearing-Language Association).

### Treatment for pragmatic language disorders

If you feel that your child struggles with navigating situations that involve social communication, it may be beneficial to speak with a pediatric speech-language pathologist about your concerns. A speech-language pathologist is a licensed healthcare professional who specializes in speech and language development including pragmatic language skills. Speech therapy can focus on a wide range of skills related to these areas including appropriate use of social communication. Depending on the unique needs of your child, the speech therapist will develop a treatment plan that emphasizes language usage, language changes (to match the social context), and following rules of language (American Speech-Hearing-Language Association).



The first step in speech therapy is assessing your child's skills through a formal evaluation. The assessment will allow the speech-language pathologist to determine your child's strengths as well as target areas for speech therapy. Depending on the results of the evaluation, the speech therapist will create an individualized plan of care to target various areas of social communication and pragmatics. Speech therapy will focus on building verbal communication skills, as well as socially significant nonverbal cues such as gestures and eye contact (American Speech-Hearing-Language Association).

Parents also play an important role in the speech therapy process. Speech therapists often provide helpful strategies for parents to use at home to facilitate opportunities for social communication at home. By practicing skills such as holding conversations, making eye contact, and requesting items, parents can promote the carryover of skills practiced during speech therapy (American Speech-Hearing-Language Association).

The ultimate goal is for your child to become an effective communicator at home, at school, and in the community!

## SPEECH THERAPY SPOTLIGHT SHANNON JOHNSON

### About Shannon Johnson

Shannon Johnson, M.A., CCC-SLP graduated with distinction from California State University, Fresno earning her Bachelor of Arts degree and her Master of Arts degree in Communicative Sciences and Disorders. She is a member of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and has been awarded the Certificate of Clinical Competence. She is licensed by the Speech-Language Pathology, Audiology Board of California.



Shannon has earned the ACE Award from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Shannon has vast experience providing diagnostic and therapeutic services for children, adolescents, and adults with a wide variety of diagnoses including apraxia, articulation and phonological disorders, autism, dysphagia, fluency disorders, pragmatic disorders, and receptive and expressive language delays. Shannon is a knowledgeable Speech-Language Pathologist with over 15 years of experience. She is a preceptor for future Speech-Language Pathologists and enjoys sharing her passion for the profession with the graduate students she mentors. Shannon is a dynamic therapist that finds joy in working with her clients at Aspire Speech and Learning Center. She is married to her college sweetheart and has two wonderful sons.

### Three words Shannon uses to describe herself

*Compassionate, Positive, Dedicated*

### Why Shannon loves being a speech therapist

I feel honored to get to know amazing people and help them achieve success in reaching their goals. I want all my clients to be happy and successful communicators and I absolutely love to make that happen!

### Shannon's favorite things

I enjoy having fun with family, traveling and experiencing new adventures, and getting lost in a great book.

### What people are saying about Shannon Johnson

*"Mrs. Shannon has helped our son a lot in the last 2 years. She is amazing!"*

*"I cannot express just how amazing Mrs. Shannon is with my son. She is always so cheerful and helpful. Our lives have been changed for the better since having her in it!"*

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Please include the address of your office & how many additional copies you would like.



**Concerned About Your Child's Speech or Development?**

**Call us today  
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## About Aspire Speech & Learning Center

Aspire Speech and Learning Center, formerly Center for Communication Skills, is a premier provider of speech therapy services and academic support in the greater Fresno area. Kathryn Wage and her team of experienced speech therapists have a long-standing and well-deserved reputation for providing services that improve the lives of their clients. The therapists are well known for supporting parents in improving optimum functional outcomes for their children. The practice has grown rapidly since moving to the California Learning Connection and provides services through a wide range of payer options, both public and private, and receives referrals from top pediatrician practices and elite preschools around Fresno. We offer free consultations to prospective clients to help determine the best fit for our offerings.

**Contact Aspire Speech & Learning at [Grow@AspireSpeech.com](mailto:Grow@AspireSpeech.com) or call (559) 228-9100**



## Aspire Speech & Learning Center

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