



The Most Important Elements of Social Language Development

Children with typical language development acquire and refine social language skills from early preschool until at least adolescence (Selman, 1981). Numerous studies have found that students with limited or impaired language skills (LI) experience a poor quality of social interactions (Craig & Gallagher, 1985; Hadley & Rice, 1991; Fujiki, Brinton, Robinson, & Watson, 1997; Craig, 1993). Children with LI generally exhibit greater deficits in social cognitive processing, particularly decoding emotions and solving social problems (Cohen, Menna, Vallance, Barwick, et al., 1998). These children have trouble inferring how someone else feels, thinking of appropriate strategies to handle social conflicts, and knowing when a conflict has been resolved (Cohen et al., 1998).

A key element of successful social interaction is taking the perspective of another person.

Students with age-appropriate social language skills are apt to have friends and be chosen by their peers for teams, parties, etc. They are likely to conduct themselves well on the playground, in the classroom, and outside of school. Those at risk for social skills are likely to encounter difficulty with reading comprehension, interactive school tasks, and unstructured time at school. They are unlikely to acquire and keep friends by compromising and taking other actions to nurture long-term relationships.

Social interactions are dynamic and depend heavily on verbal and nonverbal communication. That may be the main reason children with LI and/or children who have difficulty relating to others (autism spectrum disorders) experience impaired social interaction skills (Fujiki, Brinton, Hart, & Fitzgerald, 1999).

A key element of successful social interaction is taking the perspective of another person. This skill is essential to conflict negotiation and, in general, getting along with others. Students who do not or cannot take someone else's perspective often have difficulty "getting it" in many contexts, including comprehending what they read (character motivation, etc.), realizing why school rules are important, and even appropriately interpreting everyday interactions. The social growth and acceptance of such children may depend on training to help them understand and express their own perspectives and recognize other people's perspectives (Brinton, Fujiki, & McKee, 1998).

In addition to understanding others' perspectives, students require these skills to successfully interact socially within the academic environment:

- Detect, understand, and use nonverbal communication
- Make logical inferences
- Read other people's emotions
- Predict what others intend to do and why
- Interpret context clues to grasp situation dynamics
- State problems clearly
- Propose appropriate solutions to problems or strategies to resolve conflicts
- Evaluate the pros and cons of completed social interactions
- Use tact, be considerate of others, avoid being rude or hurtful
- Consider the long-term relationship consequences of remarks or action