

# What is pragmatic language?

*Pragmatic language* refers to the rules for social language. Pragmatics involve being able to use language for different purposes, being able to change language according to the needs of a listener or situation, and following the rules for conversations and storytelling. Things like being able to take turns in conversation, introducing new conversational topics appropriately, being able to interpret facial expressions and tone of voice, understanding personal space, and eye contact are all *pragmatic language* skills.

*Pragmatic language difficulties may also be referred to as a social skills deficit or disorder.*

*An individual with a pragmatic language disorder may:*

- say inappropriate things during conversation
- have a hard time sharing with others
- jump around from topic to topic
- tell stories in a disorganized way
- have little variety in language use
- have difficulty understanding when conversation partners need clarification or explanation
- ask questions that are difficult to follow
- have difficulty maintaining friendships
- stand too close to others when speaking
- understand concrete and literal language, but struggle with abstract language and figures of speech

A pragmatic language impairment may occur by itself, with no other disorders or issues present. However, it may also be seen with disorders such as *autism* or a *language disorder*.

It is important to note that social skills vary between different cultures. As long as a person is able to understand and appropriately follow the social customs of his/her culture, that is not considered a disorder.

## How do *pragmatic language disorders* affect academics & the school setting?

Pragmatic language skills – or social skills – are very valuable tools that students need to learn in order to succeed in life, education, and future employment. Students need to know how to interact appropriately with both peers and adults in various settings.

### *A pragmatic language disorder...*

- may negatively impact a student's ability to develop typical peer and adult relationships
- may cause social isolation
- may cause a student to have difficulty getting needs met because he/she doesn't understand how to use language appropriately to do so
- may cause a student to not give appropriate background information when writing or speaking; he/she may jump into a topic without realizing that others will have difficulty understanding what he/she is talking about
- may cause struggles with reading comprehension due to difficulty making inferences and understanding things that are implied but not directly stated
- makes it difficult to understand riddles, figurative language, or sarcasm
- causes difficulty reading others' facial expressions and social cues, which can lead to frustration and negative behaviors
- causes difficulty with turn taking skills, which may result in frequent interruptions in the classroom setting
- makes it difficult to understand how to appropriately greet others, gain attention, or request help or information