

## PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE

### What is this developmental skill?

Pragmatic language refers to the social use of language. It includes taking turns in conversation, staying on topic, interpreting facial expressions and tone of voice, understanding humor, adjusting communication for different situations, and recognizing what others know or feel.

Pragmatic language allows children to build friendships and participate successfully in everyday social interactions.

### How does this normally develop?

Children develop pragmatic language through frequent social interactions with responsive adults and peers. Everyday conversations, family meals, pretend play, and cooperative activities provide opportunities to practice conversational rules and perspective-taking.

### How can neglect interfere with its development?

Neglect often reduces both the quantity and quality of social interactions needed to develop these skills. Children may:

- Interrupt frequently.
- Talk only about their own interests.
- Miss nonverbal social cues.
- Struggle with conversational turn-taking.
- Misinterpret sarcasm, humor, or tone.
- Have difficulty maintaining friendships.

These difficulties often result from limited social learning opportunities rather than intentional rudeness.

### What might this look like?

A child dominates every conversation without noticing others' reactions. Another gives one-word responses and rarely initiates conversation. A child may stand too close to others, interrupt repeatedly, or misunderstand jokes, leading peers to reject them socially.

### Parenting Implications

Caregivers can strengthen pragmatic language by:

- Modeling respectful conversations.
- Practicing turn-taking during play.
- Talking about facial expressions and body language.
- Role-playing social situations.
- Reading stories and discussing characters' thoughts and feelings.
- Providing gentle coaching rather than criticism during social interactions.
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### From Understanding to Attunement

When a child struggles socially, ask yourself: "*Has this child had enough safe, supportive relationships to learn the unwritten rules of conversation?*" Pragmatic language develops through relationships. As children experience consistent, responsive interactions, they gradually learn not only what to say, but how, when, and why to communicate with others.