

PERSPECTIVES



Genesee Intermediate School District

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GENESYS ATHLETIC CLUB
Adapted Aquatic Swim Program
For children with challenges



Open to members and non-members

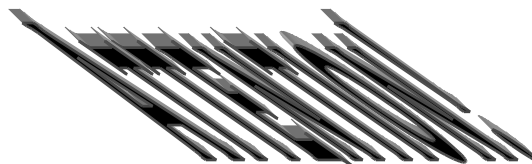
Tuesday evenings — class meets once a week for 6 weeks

7:00-8:00 p.m. Session 1	Sept. 16, 23, 30, Oct. 7, 14, 21
Session 2	Oct. 28, Nov. 4, 11, 18, Dec. 2, 9

This is a fun interactive class with a parent or other adult in the water with the student. Students will learn basic water safety skills while improving posture, muscle strength, and joint flexibility. Instructor, Tera Galloway has worked in aquatics for many years and has specific training and certification in aquatics therapy.

Program Fee: Members \$24 Non members \$36

Visit our website: www.GenesysAthleticClub.com
801 Health Park Blvd., Grand Blanc, MI 48439
(in the Genesys Regional Medical Center Complex)
810-606-7300



It is fall and another school year begins. We are updating our mailing list. IF YOU WISH TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE **PERSPECTIVES**, which includes information on conferences and the GISD Autism Support Group meetings, PLEASE CALL Patti Dombrowski at 810-591-4877 or return this form. Otherwise you will be removed from the mailing list.

Yes. I would like to continue to receive **PERSPECTIVES**.

Name: _____

Address/
School Building _____

City/Zip: _____

Can Social Pragmatic Skills be Tested?

Reprinted from: IRCA Reporter, Vol, 8, No. 3, 2003

By definition individuals with an autism spectrum disorder have difficulty with what is called the pragmatic aspect of language. Parents and speech language pathologists often ask, "What test will demonstrate that my child (or student) has difficulties with pragmatics?" This question reflects the assumption that there is such an instrument. There isn't one AND there may never be a singular effective standardized test of pragmatic ability. While this response may come as a shock, it may be more understandable if one knows more about the nature of pragmatics and knows how one can assess pragmatic function.

What is pragmatics and what does it involve?

If one has good pragmatic skills, he or she is able to communicate an appropriate message in an effective manner within a reasonable time frame in a real life situation. Pragmatics is like a cake. The cake is the whole or gestalt that represents the combination of many ingredients. No one ingredient is representative of the edible item, that we call a "cake." In a somewhat related fashion, as one continues the cake analogy, no singular standardized test of ingredients can effectively capture the essence of the whole or gestalt called "pragmatics." In order to communicate an appropriate message in a given situation, many ingredients have to mesh in an **instantaneous** fashion. Within a few seconds or less, the typical communicator must:

- Note the current social situation in which the communication interaction is occurring, including the nonverbal cues.
- Pay attention and receive the complete verbal message delivered by the speaker.
- Analyze the meaning of the verbal and nonverbal messages within the context of the conversational situation.
- Check the tentative interpretation of the messages against one's bank of social knowledge.
- Formulate a response inside one's head based on the above, after considering several possible options.
- Draw upon one's knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.
- Speak or generate the message in a manner that is understandable to others.
- Be prepared to receive and analyze the new incoming message response, complete with its nonverbal and hidden messages.
- Begin the cycle all over again.

This sounds like quite a task, but typical speakers do it all the time with little effort. For the person with an autism spectrum disorder, such situations often represent a serious challenge.

What can contribute to poor social pragmatic skills in a given situation?

The potential for difficulty or lack of effectiveness in any given situation is ample. A person may have difficulty because of one or more of the following reasons. He or she may have:

- Limited awareness that a message is being directed to him or her.
- Difficulty distilling the auditory message amid competing incoming sensory stimuli.
- Difficulty processing the message of the communication partner because the communication partner:
 - ◊ Spoke rapidly;
 - ◊ Used vocabulary that was unfamiliar to the listener;
 - ◊ Spoke about events that were of no interest to the listener;
 - ◊ Spoke about unfamiliar events, ideas, or experiences;
 - ◊ Used grammar that was too complex for the listener;
 - ◊ Used figurative language that made interpretation difficult; or
 - ◊ Used gestures that were distracting and meaningless for the listener.
- Limited knowledge about the social world, including understanding the mental state/perspective of the communication partner.
- Difficulty sifting through all the confusing information and meshing it with stored knowledge/social skills training in a rapid fashion.

One may or may not have the appropriate social skill knowledge. One may have misread the social setting or been oblivious to certain cues. The important issue, however, is whether one can access that social knowledge on the spot and use it in a real situation to guide a response, even though one might feel confused, anxious, over stimulated, or rushed.
- Difficulty planning the response in terms of message intent, vocabulary and syntax.

Some individuals may experience word-finding problems and have considerable difficulty using mature and complex language forms to express their ideas. Individuals often have difficulty understanding that they must consider the other person's background and perspective. Too often, the listener furnishes too little information to facilitate meaningful understanding.
- Delivery of the message may be too rapid or too choppy to be intelligible or understandable.

Even speakers without ASD "flub up" in various situations because they are nervous or anxious. The message may be very clear inside the head of the speaker but getting the communication partner to understand the message intent can be a challenge. A smooth and effective delivery style is not always easy.

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- Been unprepared to listen to the other person's response and begin the cycle again while maintaining the same topic. So much effort may have gone into formulating the first response that the person with ASD isn't prepared to begin the process again without more of a break. Other individuals with ASD may be very used to one-turn conversations and not have any expectation that a second response will be expected.

How does one assess pragmatics?

When one considers the complexity of the process listed above, it is understandable why a singular formal test would not accurately identify something as complex and context based as pragmatic problems. Pragmatics represents the whole act of communication and is not simply a sum of the parts.

One might, however, initially identify that an individual has a problem with pragmatics (the whole) and particular situations that present problems by:

- Observing the person with ASD.
- Interviewing numerous people about what communication situations are challenging and identification of particular difficulties.
- Completing inventories or checklists.
- Using informal situations to sample the person's ability to deal with specific communication challenges.

For an elementary school age student, this might translate into an observation in the classroom during group instruction and small group sessions, at recess, and in the lunchroom. Parents teachers, aides and peers might contribute useful information during an interview or through a checklist. The student him or herself also might be able to identify situations that represent a challenge by completing a checklist. Challenging situations could be embedded within the daily routine so that the student might demonstrate how he manages situations such as being overlooked as papers are passed out, someone teasing him, or needing to ask for assistance with a difficult task. This type of data is called qualitative data. This data collection method is used to analyze complex behaviors such as social interaction. Qualitative data can be as legitimate as quantitative data (test scores) for decision-making about programming needs if it has been collected in an appropriate manner.

Does formal testing have a place in the assessment of pragmatic skills?

The *Test of Pragmatic Language*, for example, attempts to look at the application of social knowledge. The test involves pictured situations and requires responding to static, non-emotional, decontextualized situations. The examiner provides information about the situation and asks what the person might say in that situation. The test can provide some information about social knowledge but one has to understand the limitations. If one has been taught about certain social situations and has good associational recall, one might be able to pass the test. This same person may have significant problems with natural pragmatic situations, however, when he or she is in a real life situation. He or she may have great difficulty coping with emotions and/or may be in sensory overload. He or she might be clueless about the subtleties of the situation. He or she may be unable to manage the demand for a rapid processing of information. And, he or she may be unable to deal with the rapid need for formulation and delivery of an appropriate response. In other words, the test produces false negative data for some children because it cannot capture enough of the holistic demands of real life situations. Emotional state, not measured by the test, can play an important role in how well one can use what he or she knows. The degree of challenge emanating from the demands will differ by individual and by specific situation.

Other types of formal testing might be used if the purpose is clearly defined and the results reviewed within the holistic context that pragmatics represent. For example, if it is suspected that the student has trouble with understanding complex grammar, this could be probed. Intervention focused on only this one underpinning element, however, may or may not improve pragmatic abilities unless coupled with increasing social knowledge. The reverse is also true. If one learns more about social knowledge, one may still be ineffective in real situations because other significant components collectively also impact performance. It may be very important to screen or evaluate selective contributing elements such as vocabulary, work retrieval, even representative skills, and so forth and consider these as one attempts to improve pragmatic skills for a specific individual.

Summary

By definition, individuals with an autism spectrum disorder will have difficulty with social pragmatic function. It does not take formal testing to identify that a social pragmatic problem exists. No singular test can evaluate the complexity of situational pragmatic skills. Passing a test such as the *Test of Pragmatic Language* can represent a false negative and exclude someone from needed support and intervention. Sometimes information from selective tests or subtests that probe specific elements that contribute to pragmatic competency, however, might be helpful for program design. Scoring within normal limits, however, on any of these tests does not mean that there is no pragmatic disorder but rather that one of the components, under specific conditions, does not seem to be a major problem.

Qualitative data is legitimate and can be gathered through various means. Individuals will differ in terms of how effective they are in specific situations, with specific partners, and as the mental and emotional demands of situations change. The complexity of pragmatics must be considered as intervention programs are designed.

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A special thanks is extended to Diane Twachtman-Cullen for her feedback during the preparation of this article.

Contributed by: Beverly Vicker, Speech Language Pathologist

Websites Maintained by People with Autism/Asperger's Syndrome

Each year brings new challenges and successes. As the numbers of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders increases so does the need for information. The following are some websites on Autism and Asperger's Syndrome:

ORGANIZATION	WEBSITE ADDRESS
Autism Society of America	www.autism-society.org
On-line Asperger's Syndrome Information and Support-O.A.S.I.S.	http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/ or www.aspergersyndrome.org
Asperger's Syndrome Support Network Home Page	http://home.vicnet.net.au/~autism
Institute for the Study of Neurologically Typical	http://isnt.autistics.org
Autism Society of Michigan	www.autism-mi.org
Tony Attwood	www.tonyattwood.com
Asperger's Disorder Home Page	www.aspergers.com
The Autism Channel Link	http://www.autism.clarityconnect.com
Asperger Syndrome Education Network	www.aspennj.org
ACS-US (Aspen of America, Inc.)	www.asperger.org
The Asperger's Northwest Home Page	http://aspergersnw.tripod.com
The Centre for the Study of Autism	www.autism.org
Gifted Resource Center of New England	www.grcne.com
Future Horizons	http://www.futurehorizons-autism.com
The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding	www.TheGrayCenter.org
Special Families Guide	www.specialfamilies.com
Diana's Personal Asperger Page	http://people.freenet.de/anaid
Linus Moke's Webpage	www.linusmoke.com/siteindex/psych.htm
George Handley's Webpage	www.webspawner.com/users/asperger
The Mind Within	http://within.autistics.org
Liane Holliday-Willey	www.ASPIE.com
David C. Miedzianik	http://freespace.virgin.net/david.mied/index.htm
Oops...Wrong Planet Syndrome	http://www.isn.net/~jypsy
This is an excellent site for peer support, forums, and self-help strategies.	http://amug.org/~a203/

Conferences

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u>Contact</u>
Oct. 6, 2003	Parapro Training Macomb ISD	Sally Burton-Hogle, Kathy Johnson, & Anne Carpenter	vary	www.autism-mi.org 1-800-223-6722
Oct. 6, 2003	Visual Supports and Alternative Reading	Sally Burton-Hogle Kathy Johnson	vary	www.autism-mi.org 1-800-223-6722
Oct. 8, 2003	Understanding Asperger's Syndrome	Tony Attwood	\$119	www.DrDeanMooney.com or (802) 446-3577
Oct. 8-9, 2003	Autism: Building Bridges from Isolation to Interaction	Brett Hann, OT	vary	Phone: 800-397-0180 Fax: 615-331-4415
Oct. 14-15, 2003	Making Social Connections	Multiple speakers	1 day \$135 2 day \$180	www.TheGrayCenter.org
Oct. 30, 2003	Understanding "Behavior" in Autism Spectrum Disorders	Genevieve Ford	vary	www.autism-mi.org 1-800-223-6722



Government Launches Updated GovBenefits.gov Website Offers One-Stop approach to Locating Benefits

Reprinted from Advocate, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2003

The Federal government launched a new version of their Website, GovBenefits.gov, tailored to help the public determine which benefits, such as loans, insurance and training, they are eligible to receive. Other features include: a "Last Updated" feature that lets users know when new information is added to the site; a new partner room with instructions about how to become a partner of GovBenefits.gov and downloadable presentations about the project; a new pressroom with general information about the project, links to press releases, biographies of GovBenefits.gov management team, a feedback form for press inquiries; and a new Spanish page that provides an overview of the site. In addition, plans are in place to provide a translation tool for the entire site, which will make it accessible to the Spanish-speaking community.

The process of determining which benefits you may qualify for begins with a free online confidential screening tool where you are asked to answer a series of questions about yourself. GovBenefits.gov then returns a list of government benefit programs you may be eligible to receive, along with information about how you can apply. You are not required to submit your name, phone number, or Social Security number.

For more experienced user, GovBenefits allows you to

bypass questions and browse all benefit programs directly.

For more information, visit their Website, www.GovBenefits.gov, or call 1-866-4USA-DOL. Be sure to stay tuned to their site, which will continue to be expanded as they move toward a goal of offering information pertinent for all government assistance programs at the Federal, State, and Local levels.

What is the next step?

GovBenefits is a joint program of 10 federal agencies and is managed by the U.S. Department of Labor.

How can my family participate in an autism genetic research study? The Center for Human Genetics at Duke University Medical Center has been conducting an autism genetic research study since 1995. Margaret A. Pericak-Vance, Ph.D., Director of the DUMC Center for Human Genetics, is the principal investigator of this genetic research study of autism and related disorders. If you family has one of more members with autism (age 21 or younger) you can help by participating in the study. For more information or to enroll your family in this research study, please contact the autism patient coordinators at 1-800-283-4316, ext. 1 or email center@chg.duhs.duke.edu.

Genesee Intermediate School District

Special Education Services Center
2413 West Maple Avenue
Flint, Michigan 48507-3493

Phone: 810-591-4877
Fax: 810-591-4548



Coming Up: Autism Support Group

Date: Thursday, October 23, 2003 **Time:** 6:00 p.m.

Place: Genesee Intermediate School District
Special Education Services Center-South, GenNET classroom
5089 Pilgrim Road, Flint 48507

(Pilgrim Road is south off Maple Avenue, between VanSlyke and Torrey Roads. Parking is located in the rear of the building. Enter through the far east doors.)

Social Stories and How To Write Them.

Parts of a video of Carol Gray on social stories will be shown. There will be examples of different ways to do the stories for different ages. If you have used social stories and would like to share them, please bring them. There will be time to practice writing your own. Parents, professionals and others who are interested are invited to attend.



If you plan to attend or have questions, please call Becky Downing at 810-591-4868 and leave your name and phone number.

Homework Help!

The Genesee Public Library now offers live homework help, an online tutoring service from Tutor.com for students 4th through 12th grades. This connects with expert tu-



tors in math, science, social studies, and English over the internet. A Genesee District Library card is needed to access the service from home or the library.

Students can access the service from home by going to the Genesee District Library's website at gdl.falcon.edu. The tutors are certified teachers, college professors, professional tutors, and graduate students.