Social Language: Assessment & Treatment

Matthew J. Braun, MA, CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
Center for Child Health and Development
University of Kansas Medical Center

Communication vs. Speech/Language
- Communication can be defined as –
  “The PROCESS participants use to exchange information and ideas, needs and desires...each must be alert to the informational needs of the other to ensure that messages are conveyed effectively and that intended meanings are preserved.” (Owens, 1996, p. 11)

The Process of Communication
As part of the larger process of communication, we have
LANGUAGE & SPEECH

Language and ASD
- Core Deficit Areas-
  - Language/Communication
  - Socialization
  - Behaviors
- This includes- Not Just Receptive Language and Expressive Language, but, Pragmatics and Social Understanding

Pragmatics and Social Understanding
- Pragmatics can be described as: “the study of rules that govern language use in various social situations” (Roseberry-McKibbin & Hegde, 2006)
- It involves both using & recognizing social cues/behaviors
- Abstract & Involves Taking the Perspectives of Others
- Social Skills vs. Social Competence
Understanding the Role of Pragmatics in Communication

Pragmatics and Social Understanding
- Receptive Language – Understanding Social Cues
- Expressive Language – Using Social Cues
- Speech/Articulation

Social Skills Vs. Social Competence
- Social skills: the actual acts of being social - saying hello, responding to questions, participating in conversation, etc.
- Social Competence: reading the signs and knowing when to use and apply the skills

Assessing Social Communication

Formal
- Standardized Testing
- Rating Scales
- Interviews
- Usually Matched to a specific disorder like ASD

Informal
- Observation
- Interview
- Direct Interactions
- Tends to be a better indicator as it occurs in natural environments

Social Communication Assessment
- Measuring not just the presence of skills, but also their QUALITY (social competence)
- Evaluating the reciprocal nature of the responses
- Do interactions feel one sided? (hyperlexic, pedantic, echolalia)

Elements of Social Communication

Evaluate the following elements:
- Eye Contact
- Showing and Pointing
- Joint Attention
- Affect and Prosody
- Gestures & Facial Expressions

Elements of Social Communication
- Recognizing Social Bids and Social Cues
- Reciprocal Responses
- Sharing Enjoyment
- Play Skills
- Asking Questions and Verbal Chat
Differentiating

- What else might it be?* Can we attribute these characteristics to other conditions like:
  - ADHD
  - Language Impairment
  - Intellectual Disabilities
  - Other Behavioral Disorder

*Should be done as part of an interdisciplinary team

---

Now that we’ve identified the areas of need and the particular skills to work on, how do we proceed?

---

Treatment Planning

- Identify Goals based on ALL team members’ input – including family members, teachers, administrators
  - Begin by identifying strengths and emerging skills on which you can build
  - Identify several skills to address and pick one or two at a time.

---

Treatment Planning

- Social skills are context based, so provide training and practice in the natural environment
  - Have a plan for a home program
  - Have a plan for measuring progress/data collection

---

GENERALIZATION

- Have a plan for GENERALIZATION
  - Identify who will be involved, how they will be involved and what settings they will be involved in
  - What will it look like

---

Strategies for Teaching Social Skills

- What does the literature say?
  - Essentially, there’s’ no one BEST way
  - Social skills are context based and should be both taught and practiced within their context
  - Naturally occurring situations
What does the literature say?

- There is good preliminary evidence to suggest the efficacy of video modeling, peer buddies and role playing.
- Most social skills programs are good for teaching isolated skills, but generalization is not achieved.

Take Home Messages

- Involve the entire team and identify each person’s role
- Have a home program and plans for generalization
- Teach skills in the natural environment within their context
- Let your data be your guide and use your data to contribute to the limited body of evidence

Strategies for Teaching Social Skills

- Literally Hundreds of Curricula
- Social Stores™
- Role Playing
- Video Modeling
- Peer Buddy

Bibliography/References


