



# Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

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## Small Group or Individual Pragmatics Training Program

This program is designed to give students the opportunity to study other people and their communication skills and to learn effective communication strategies. In a small group there is opportunity for sharing and group dynamics reduce the pressure on each individual. Use of video tape, role playing and television will make the activities more fun and exciting.

Program involves:

- 9 to 12 regular sessions.
- 4-6 students in a group with 1-2 trainers.
- Students at a similar level of communication skills.
- Learning through lecture, discussion, role playing on video tape, analysis of mock conversations on video, and analysis of TV shows and movie videos.
- Significant others, including parents, siblings and teachers, should be involved when possible.

### Skill Steps:

1. The program begins with a general discussion of communication, with verbal and nonverbal examples shown and discussed. Analysis of nonverbal and paralinguistic cues from television and leaders who are role playing will be less threatening and will provide lots of opportunities for analysis and discussion.
2. Then the program covers conversation rules with examples of each. For example:
  - Say just enough and not too much or too little.
  - Don't say something that you believe to be false, or speak about something for which you lack evidence.
  - Make your contribution relate to the topic and the situation.
  - Be clear about what you want to say, and be as orderly as possible.

At this point a mixture of methods can be used, including TV, role playing and video taping. This will help to keep the focus on the skills and not on the student's performance.

3. The program then moves to conversational coordination with a discussion of and practice in:

- turn taking
- openers and closers
- topic introduction
- maintenance and shifting

Some discussion of factors that change the rules is included (e.g., emergencies, politeness conventions). At this stage the students will need opportunities to practice and discuss conversation strategies.

4. At this point the program introduces a framework to help students identify the four key elements of communication; participants, setting, topic and task or purpose. The students then practice categorizing events or situations from their own lives and video tapes according to the 4 parameters and choose the best strategies for attaining their objectives.

## **Discussion in General of Framework or Parameters of Social Interaction**

1. The participants: Who are you communicating with? What attributes about this person is important to you and to him or her? Is the person a close friend or a stranger? Is the person a peer or a high-status person? All important characteristics of the other participant should be weighed in selecting the communication approach.
2. The setting of communication: What physical and psychological factors of the communication situation are relevant to your communication right now? Is the conversation in school, on the playground, or in you own home? Does it take place in the evening, after breakfast, or during recess?
3. The topic of the conversation: What is the content of the communication? Is it small talk or is the topic one of serious import?
4. The task(s) of those involved: What does each person hope to accomplish by the communication event? What basic functions are paramount for each person? Motives, concerns, and objectives play a role.

Most students will need repeated opportunities to learn and practice new skills. In addition, it may take detailed planning to enable the students to carry the skills over to other settings. Some students with emotional and behavioural problems will revert to old, well established patterns of dialogue or behaviour when they are under stress. Part of the group's activities will focus on situations which might trigger poor behaviour and provide alternative scripts for the student. Success will likely take some time and it is important to celebrate successes and provide lots of positive feedback.

**Source:** *Social Skills Training for School Age Children with Language and Behaviour Deficits* by Genese Warr-Leeper, Professor, University of Western Ontario.  
Framework by Barbara Woods in her book Children and Communication, Prentice-Hall, 1976 and 1980)