

Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder

- **What is a Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder?**
 - Persistent difficulties in the **social use of nonverbal and verbal** communication skills.
 - Sufficient language skills must be developed before this disorder can be detected, so a diagnosis of SCD should not be made until children are 4–5 years of age.
 - Social communication disorder can co-occur with other communication disorders (these include language disorder & speech sound disorder) but cannot be diagnosed in the presence of autism spectrum disorder.
 - The symptoms are **not attributable to another medical/ neurological condition**/autism spectrum disorder/ intellectual disability.
- **What signs may a child/ young person with a social (pragmatic) communication disorder show?**
 - Difficulty in using language for social purposes (e.g. greeting a person/starting a conversation/ keeping a conversation going on topic).
 - Difficulty appropriately matching communication to the social context/ following rules of the communication context (e.g. speaking differently in a classroom than on a playground/ talking differently to a child than to an adult).
 - Difficulty understanding nonliteral language (e.g., jokes, idioms, metaphors)
 - Difficulty using verbal language with nonverbal communication (e.g. eye-contact/facial expression) effectively.
- **How will this affect my child?**
 - SCD can have an impact on a child's abilities to engage in effective **communication** with peers and adults.
 - A child with SCD will often have difficulty forming and maintaining effective **social relationships**.
 - SCD is often a long-term condition that can result in functional limitations in academic achievement or **occupational performance**.



- **How can you support your child at home?**

1. **Be your child's social play coach:**

- a. **Set up social play activities**

- i. Find a peer that will have similar interests and will have slightly greater social communication skills (so that your child is more likely to experience social success). It is usually easier for a child to work with one friend/peer at a time.
 - ii. Set up an activity that encourages social communication (see below for suggestions)
 - iii. Give your child and his/her social-play partner specific directions about how to engage with the activity (use pictures/visual schedule and demonstrations of actions required to facilitate understanding).

- b. **Step out and stand by**

- c. **Step in** (when your child needs help with social interaction)

- i. Give your child verbal cues when necessary in the interaction (e.g. 'answer X's question'/'say something about what X said').

- Activities that encourage social communication:

- ❖ **Crafts & construction** to be done in unison with peer
 - ❖ **Singing songs & moving to music** with actions done in unison
 - ❖ **Teamwork activities that allows for turn-taking** (e.g. making a snack, baking, building a fort/tower with blocks/pillows). Even putting a puzzle together/using a shape-sorted can become a teamwork activity (e.g. have one person be the 'keeper' of the puzzle pieces/shapes. The keeper is in charge of holding and handing the pieces to the other person who completes the job).

2. **Discuss the social interaction before it starts:**

- a. Discuss what a friend is (e.g. friends like some of the same things, friends stay and play together, friends ask each other questions to find out what they like, friends look at each other and listen to each other...).
 - b. Prepare your child for the social interaction by talking about specific things to do/say when he/she gets together with their social-play partner (e.g. 'how can you find out what game X wants to play?')

3. **Give positive reinforcement for good social skills:**

- Reinforce what your child does well socially—use behaviour-specific praise and concrete reinforcement if needed to shape pro-social behaviour (e.g. 'you kept that conversation going really nicely with information that was on-topic').