



Semantic Pragmatic Disorder is a communication disorder. (semantic = the relationship between words or sentences and their meanings; pragmatic = making language work in context). It is believed that people with SPD are unable to process all the given information from certain situations.

The disorder relates in some way to autism because children with SPD have difficulties in the same three areas called 'The Triad': socialising, language, and imagination. It is often described as the 'outer spectrum of autism', but all children with features of autism will have semantic and pragmatic difficulties with language. It is always best to have a specialist medical consultation to exclude autism or find out where a child might be along the ASD spectrum and if there are any additional problems such as ADHD or dyslexia.

Children with SPD may behave very differently at home and at school, so both parents' and teachers' concerns should always be taken seriously.

At every moment we are automatically (subconsciously) absorbing information, processing and analysing it, discarding what is irrelevant and storing what is important. We use this to build up a bank or memory of words and meanings, like time and feeling words, which have no visual reference.

When we speak to someone we use our past experiences to interpret their intentions and their wants and we imagine what might happen next. People who have difficulties with this form of processing will have problems with determining appropriate responses. They may appear rude or outspoken and be unaware when the other person wants to end the conversation.

Children with SPD will talk at length on topics like Thomas the Tank Engine, dinosaurs and Star Trek, and are often genuinely surprised when they find not everyone is so enthusiastic! They can cope with straightforward instructions such as "Give me the red book" but may have difficulties in responding to "What have you been doing today?" as it is not explicit enough. They will relate best to sensitive adults but need a helping hand with peer relationships.

Children with SPD may show some of the following features (but not all!) in their early years

When talking they may

- sound very grown-up
- speak fluently, but on their terms
- have difficulty giving specific information on one event
- give no appropriate eye contact/facial expression exchange.

In learning, they may

- have problems with abstract concepts (next week; guess)
- be late or very early readers, but show little understanding
- have some motor skills problems (writing, drawing, bike riding, dressing, football)
- be easily distracted in a busy environment
- struggle with team events and games.

Behaviourally, they can

- appear rude, arrogant, gauche
- embarrass others
- be over-active or too passive
- insist on following rules and expect others to
- be isolated – won't ask for help or for children to play with them
or
- be over-friendly.

Other possible features may include

- dislike of crowds
- food fads
- problems with social events (school breaks, parties)
- over-sensitive to some noises or tastes.

In school, children with SPD need

- a quiet, orderly working environment with visual clues
- predictability to reduce anxieties – turn-taking, changes in routine clearly signalled
- clear rules on how to behave using concrete language they can understand
- simple, specific instructions spoken slowly – 'put the toys in the box' not 'tidy up'
- as much as possible written down – clear timetable, instructions, messages
- small work groups, good role models, special small communication group activities

- time to reply when asked a question (but tactfully replying for them, on occasions, can help understanding)
- help with socialising – specific games, role-play
- constant positive reminders supported by visual/written information
- a home/school diary – on a daily basis if possible – with regular information on topic work to facilitate pre-tutoring and shared information
- constant encouragement and praise.

Other tips

- Try to respond to what is intended, not what is actually said
- explain sarcasm, metaphors, jokes, when you use them
- employ 'mapping' technique (matching your words to the child's thoughts)
- double check understanding by asking a child what is expected of him/her
- utilise special 'interests' rather than ignoring or banning them
- increase self-esteem by giving regular little jobs to do
- allow a child to observe other children carrying out a task first
- teach the meanings of useful idiomatic expressions and appropriate playground language.



USEFUL CONTACTS

AFASIC

Email: info@afasic.org.uk

Helpline: M-F: 10.30-2.30 0845 355 5577

Offer advice, support, information, publications, courses and conferences, activity days for young people and have local support groups.

Website: www.afasic.org.uk

The Association of Speech & Language Therapists in Independent Practice

Tel: 01494 488306

Find your nearest independent speech and language therapist (SALT) via their website.

Website: www.helpwithtalking.com

I CAN

Tel: 0845 225 4071

Offer advice, support, information and training courses for parents and professionals. They run Early Years Centres and two Special Schools for children aged 4-19 (both with assessment centres).

Website: www.ican.org.uk

Email: info@ican.org.uk

National Autistic Society

Website: www.autism.org.uk

Helpline: M-F: 10am-4pm 0845 070 4004

Nationwide organisation for people with autistic spectrum disorders. They have information on SPD which can be found at this link:

<http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2493&a=20464>.

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Tel: 020 7378 1200

They have information on how to get a referral to a local NHS speech and language therapist or how to find an independent therapists.

Website: www.rcslt.org

READING

Contact the above organisations for their reading lists and the following SEN publishers:

See also OAASIS information sheet 'Books – where to find them'

Routledge Education

(member of the Taylor Francis Group)

Tel: 020 7017 6563

Website: www.routledgeeducation.com

(academic and research based) or

www.routledge4teachers.com for teachers/parents.

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Website: www.jkp.com

Email: post@jkp.com

Tel: 020 7833 2307

Sage Publications

Formerly Paul Chapman Publishing, for all professionals working in schools and educational settings (includes Lucky Duck classroom resources).

Web: www.sagepub.co.uk

Email: market@sagepub.co.uk

SEN Marketing

Books and software for special educational needs.

Website: www.senbooks.co.uk

Tel: 01924 871697

Speechmark

Website: www.speechmark.net

Email: info@speechmark.net

Tel: 0845 034 4610

The National Autistic Society

The NAS books are supplied by Central Books.

You can order online at

Website: www.autism.org.uk or by telephone.

Tel: 0845 458 9911

The internet book shop

www.amazon.co.uk

USEFUL INTERNET SITES

See Useful Contacts above, plus

The **Surrey NAS** website is excellent for autistic spectrum disorders: use their search facility and you will find many good links – www.mugsy.org

www.talkingpoint.org.uk is a one stop shop for information on communication disorders and communication development. A clear, informative website with separate sections for parents and professionals covers many areas including information, support and education. Also has Talking Links section with post code search of speech and language provision. Developed by I CAN, RCSLT and Afasic.

Another American site, **American Hyperlexia Organisation** www.hyperlexia.org/sp1.html has an in-depth and clear article, if a few years old now, on all aspects of SPD.

The Cambian Group run seven residential special schools and colleges for young people with autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger syndrome/HFA, severe learning difficulties. OAASIS can give you advice on the schools and send you their prospectuses or visit the website www.cambianeducation.com.

OAASIS produces a wide range of free Information Sheets, 8 publications entitled 'First Guide to...' and wallet sized cards explaining 9 learning disabilities.

Please contact OAASIS (see front of sheet for contact details) for the full list, or view and download them on the website at

www.oaasis.co.uk.

All sheets are checked and amended annually. Please ensure you have the current version.