

Semantic Pragmatic Disorder

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': social skills, communication and inflexibility of thought. 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.

Semantic Pragmatic Disorder

USEFUL CONTACTS

AFASIC

For most children and young people learning to communicate comes easily. For some children and young people, however, it is a major challenge as they have a speech and language impairment.

Afasic is working to support these children and their parents, enabling them to overcome their speech and language difficulties. Offer advice, support, information, publications, courses and conferences, activity days for young people and have local support groups and online parent forums.

Website: www.afasicengland.org.uk/

(separate websites for Cymru, NI and Scotland).

UK Helpline: 0845 355 5577

Email: info@afasic.org.uk

I CAN

Children with communication difficulties might find it hard to express themselves, understand words, speak in sentences and understand simple instructions. Daily life for these children can be distressing and frustrating. They can struggle to read, learn, join in, make friends and achieve.

I CAN are the experts in helping children with communication difficulties. If we find and help these children and their families, we can unlock their potential. They run Early Years Centres and two Special Schools for children aged 4-19 (both with assessment centres).

Website: www.ican.org.uk

Advice line: 020 7843 2544

Email: enquiries@ican.org.uk

National Autistic Society

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

www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/relatedconditions/

[semantic-pragmatic-disorder.aspx](http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/relatedconditions/semantic-pragmatic-disorder.aspx)

Helpline: 0808 800 4104

Contact a Family

UK wide advice on all aspects of caring for a child with any special need, disability or rare disorder; national SEN help line; downloadable fact sheets and publications; Connected magazine; local support groups and parent reps; campaigns and research etc.

Website: www.cafamily.org.uk

Tel: 0808 808 3555

Email: info@cafamily.org.uk

They also run a separate site Making Contact where you can share your experiences, get advice or local support from other parents with children with the same condition.
www.makingcontact.org.uk

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

They have information on what a SALT does, how to get a referral to a local NHS SALT, or how to find an independent therapist.

Website: www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/what_is_an_slit

Tel: 020 7378 1200

The Association of Speech & Language Therapists in Independent Practice

Information on speech and language difficulties and common causes, benefits and costs, find your nearest independent speech and language therapist (SALT) via their website.

Website: www.helpwithtalking.com

Tel: 01494 488306

Email: www.helpwithtalking.com/contact

READING

See the Cambian information sheet 'Books – where to find them' for a list of specialist publishers with a huge range of books.

USEFUL INTERNET SITES

Hi2u for people with hidden impairments

www.hi2u.org/visitors/spd.htm

Talking Point is a one stop shop for information on children with speech, language and communication difficulties. 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.

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

The National Autistic Society Surrey Branch website has archived articles on Semantic Pragmatic Disorder at:

www.mugsy.org/cgi-bin/search/search.pl

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank AFASIC for their help in checking the content of this information sheet.

PLEASE NOTE: Cambian has provided the details in this document in good faith and for information only and has not verified details provided by third parties. Nothing in this document implies any recommendation or endorsement of any course of action or service and you must ensure that anything you proceed with is appropriate for your requirements. Cambian accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage you sustain by taking action or dealing with third parties as set out in this document.

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



Cambian is the largest provider of specialist residential education and care for young people with Autism, Asperger Syndrome and other associated complex needs in the United Kingdom. Cambian is trusted by hundreds of parents and over 70 Local Education Authorities. www.cambiagroup.com