

## **Pragmatic Language Impairment (PLI)**

### **What is pragmatic language impairment?**

Pragmatic language impairment may comprise difficulties in:

- Developing language in the context and environment in which it is used.
- Knowing and using the 'rules' which govern the use of language in context

Pragmatic language skills are important for successful social development and building confidence in talking.

### **Pragmatic language skills include:**

- Use and understanding of body language, e.g. gestures, facial expressions, eye contact.
- Taking turns in conversation
- Listening and speaking
- Using the appropriate volume, speed, intonation and body distance.
- Talking about a topic of interest
- Introducing a topic, being able to maintain and end conversations.
- Matching the emotion of the other person
- Repairing when a conversation goes wrong, "no I mean ...."
- Remembering what the listener already knows.
- Interpreting what the speaker intended, not just interpreting the words, e.g. "it's hot in here" , meaning open the window.
- Being concise and getting to the point

Children with pragmatic language impairment will vary greatly in what they find difficult and the level of development. They may or may not be aware of their own difficulties. Characteristically,

children may use language and make conversation in an unusual way. Their social development and play may be affected, and some children have accompanying problems such as poor co-ordination.

With some children the presenting picture may be confused with a child on the Autistic Spectrum, but they **do not** have the full range of impairments which constitutes Autistic Spectrum Disorder, e.g. in social interaction, social communication and imagination or flexibility

**Strategies to support a child with pragmatic language difficulties may focus on the development of underlying skills:**

- Attention and listening
- Understanding of language (particularly word meanings in context)
- Inferencing skills and developing an understanding of cause and effect around social situations
- Developing an understanding of emotional language and how people might feel and behave in different situations
- Use of language
- Opportunities to interact and socialise with their peer group
- Developing and understanding of the skills used in having two way conversations

Some of the strategies used to support children with social communication difficulties and Autism, may also be useful:

- Social stories
- Comic strip stories
- Social communication and interaction groups
- Visual support
- Giving clear and explicit instructions
- Using more concrete language and showing what you mean
- Taking account that the child may not be able to infer meaning from what you say – you may need to make it more explicit than with another child in your family, or class.