



Let's Talk

Learning the Rules for Conversations

“Sometimes I’m embarrassed by what my son says. I don’t know if he’s being rude or doesn’t know what to say. I had a friend over for dinner last Saturday night. My son kept interrupting her and changing the topic. We’ve talked about this before, but he just isn’t getting it.”

—Sandra

Rules for Having Conversations

Children learn to use language for different purposes. Children may:

- Greet someone—“Hi,” “Bye,” “How are you?”
- Make a promise—“I promise to clean my room.”
- Ask for something—“Can I have that book?”
- Make a comment—“Doggie’s barking.”
- Ask a question—“What’s that?” “Why?”

Children also learn to talk to different people in different ways. For example, we don’t talk to adults in the same way that we talk to babies. Children learn to use longer sentences when they talk to adults and shorter sentences when they talk to a baby or younger child.

Children also learn to talk differently in different places. They learn to use loud voices outside and quiet voices inside. They learn to use different words in the classroom than on the playground.

There are rules we follow when we have a conversation. Different cultures may have different rules. The rules may also change in different situations. Some of the rules have to do with:

- Taking turns in conversations
- Interrupting others when they are talking

Fast facts

- Having conversations is a part of language known as pragmatics.
- Even children who speak clearly can have pragmatic problems.
- A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, can help.



Learning the Rules for Conversations

- Knowing when to be quiet and when to be polite
- Changing the subject
- Using gestures and facial expressions when we talk
- Looking at people when we talk

There are also rules for telling stories. We tell stories in a certain way. We talk about what comes first, next, and last. We talk about what happened in our day.

Having Conversations

Some children may have trouble learning all the rules for speaking to others. They seem to have good talking and listening skills. They speak clearly. They use a lot of different words. They understand what you say to them. But they still may have a communication problem.

Some children need help learning the rules for having conversations. Having conversations is a part of language known as pragmatics. This is sometimes called social communication.

When Should You Be Concerned?

Children normally learn the rules for speaking as they grow. Children who have problems learning the rules have what is called a pragmatic language disorder. A child with problems speaking to others may:

- Talk for only one reason. He may only talk when he wants something but not greet people or ask questions.
- Talk the same way to all people. She may use the same words to talk to a friend and to a teacher. She may use the teacher's first name.
- Talk the same way in all places. He may shout on a baseball field and in a restaurant.
- Not follow the rules for conversation. She may give one-word answers and not keep the conversation going.
- Not follow the rules for telling stories. He may leave out important parts of a story so that it is hard to follow.



Learning the Rules for Conversations

As they learn to use language, it is normal for children to have some of these problems. But if these problems happen a lot, your child may need help. A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, can help your child.

“ I took my son to see an SLP. We learned that he really wasn't being rude. He just needed help learning how to talk in different ways to different people. His SLP helped him with conversation starters and even helped him learn to use “small talk.” Even if he slips sometimes, I don't get embarrassed. I know he has a language problem and is getting help. ”

—Sandra

Learning the rules for conversations is not easy. SLPs can help.

To learn more about language development or disorders or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

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