

What does a difficulty with social communication mean?

Adequate social communication skills allow us to be successful when interacting with other people. These skills involve being able to use language for different reasons, change language for different situations or listeners and follow the rules of conversation. In other words, knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say it - and also how to 'read' other people.

Young children are still in the process of mastering these skills. They are known for 'speaking their mind', being blunt, or saying something that may not be quite appropriate in a given situation.

Children who are considered to have social communication difficulties have trouble using their language skills when talking to others in a way that is expected for a child of their age and also 'tuning in' to their communication partners thoughts, ideas and reactions. These children may appear to understand language well and also have clear, even advanced speech but they often find making friends challenging.

For a child in kindergarten, this may mean that they experience difficulties with the following:

- Participating in a conversation by **taking turns** with the other speaker and not **interrupting excessively** or constantly talking over others
- **Noticing and responding to the other person's body language, gestures and facial expressions**, as well as their words
- Knowing that **there is a way to start a conversation**. You have to give your listener a little background information
- **Staying on a topic** for a few turns and not immediately switching to something that they are interested in
- Realizing that other people may not share their interests and therefore **not talking incessantly about topics that other people have no interest in**
- **Maintaining appropriate eye-contact** and checking back that their messages have been understood
- Understanding that we **communicate differently depending on the person** (e.g. friends vs teachers)

