

# OAASIS INFORMATION SHEET

## Semantic Pragmatic Disorder



**Semantic Pragmatic Disorder** (semantic = the relationship between words or sentences and their meanings; pragmatic = making language work in context) is a communication disorder. 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.

SPD 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 therefore to have a specialist medical consultation to exclude autism or find out where your child might be within the ASD spectrum and if he has any additional problems with Attention or Dyslexia. Children with SPD may also behave very differently at home from at school, and parents' 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 or salient. 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 predict their moves, 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 understanding what is appropriate to say. They may appear too rude or outspoken, and not be aware when the other person has 'had enough' - SPD children 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! Children with SPD will cope with straightforward instructions ("Give me the red book"), but may have difficulties in responding to "What have you been doing today?" as it is not explicit enough.

Children with SPD will relate best to sensitive adults but need a helping hand with peer relationships.

### Children with a semantic pragmatic communication disorder may show some of the following features (but not all!) in their early school years:

- Sound very grown-up
- Fluent speaker, but on their terms
- Difficulties giving specific information on one event
- No appropriate eye contact / facial expression exchange
- Problems with abstract concepts (next week; guess)
- Do not ask teacher for help
- Do not ask children to play with them
- Can appear rude, arrogant, gauche
- Can embarrass others
- Late reader *or* very early reader, but little understanding
- Over-active *or* too passive
- Follow rules, expect others to
- Loner, *or* over-friendly
- Bad at team events and games
- Dislike of crowds
- Food fads
- Bad at social events (school breaks, parties)
- Some motor skills problems (writing, drawing, bike riding, dressing, football)
- Over-sensitive to some noises or tastes
- Easily distracted in a busy environment

### These children need

- To learn from practical hands-on tasks
- a quiet, orderly working environment – with visual clues
- predictability to reduce their anxieties – i.e. turn-taking and changes in routine clearly signalled
- small work groups, good role models, special small communication group activities
- simple instructions spoken slowly – do not bombard with questions or non-specific orders.  
E.g. say "put the toys in the box" not "tidy up"
- time to reply when asked a question, but replying *for* them – on occasions – can help understanding
- help with socialising – specific games, role-play
- clear rules on how to behave using concrete language they can understand
- constant positive reminders supported by visual / written information
- everything written down – i.e. clear timetable, instructions, message for mother
- a diary between home and school – on a daily basis if possible – with regular information on topic work to facilitate pre-tutoring and shared information
- *constant* encouragement and praise.

Office for  
Advice  
Assistance  
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and  
Information  
on  
Special needs

**Helpline:**  
01590 622880  
**Fax:**  
01590 622687

[www.oasis.co.uk](http://www.oasis.co.uk)

**FREEPOST**  
**RLYY-TAUC-YRYS**  
**Brock House**  
**Grigg Lane**  
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**SO42 7RE**

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### Other tips:

- Try to respond to his intentions, not what he actually says, as this may not make sense
- explain sarcasm, metaphors, jokes, when you use them
- employ 'mapping' technique (matching your words to the child's thoughts)
- double check he understands by asking him what is expected of him
- utilise his special 'interests' rather than ignoring or banning them
- make him feel useful by giving him regular little jobs, eg wiping board, putting out pens
- always allow him to observe other children first
- teach the meanings of useful idiomatic expressions and appropriate playground language.

### Other Useful Contacts:

**AFASIC** 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 20 Bowling Green Lane, London EC1R 0BD

**Helpline: 0845 355 5577**

Offer advice, support, information, publications, courses and conferences and activity days for young people and have local support groups. Website: [www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk) Email: [info@afasic.org.uk](mailto:info@afasic.org.uk)

**The Association of Speech & Language Therapists in Independent Practice**

**Tel: 01494 488306**

Find your nearest freelance speech and language therapist (SALT) on their website or send an email to [asltip@awdry.demon.co.uk](mailto:asltip@awdry.demon.co.uk) Website: [www.helpwithtalking.com](http://www.helpwithtalking.com)

**I CAN** 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

**Tel: 0845 225 4071**

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

Website: [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

Email: [info@ican.org.uk](mailto:info@ican.org.uk)

**National Autistic Society** 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG

**Helpline: 0845 070 4004**

Nationwide organisation for people with autistic spectrum disorders.

Website: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

**Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**

**Tel: 020 7378 1200**

No 2 White Hart Yard, London, SE1 1NX. They have details of local NHS speech and language departments and lists of independent Speech and Language Therapists.

Website: [www.rcslt.org](http://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 6000

Website: [www.routledgeeducation.com](http://www.routledgeeducation.com)

Fax: 020 7017 6699

**Jessica Kingsley Publishers:** Website: [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

Email: [post@jkp.com](mailto:post@jkp.com)

Tel: 020 7833 2307

**SEN Marketing:** Books and software for special educational needs. Website: [www.senbooks.co.uk](http://www.senbooks.co.uk) Tel: 01924 871697

**Speechmark** – Website: [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net) Email: [info@speechmark.net](mailto:info@speechmark.net)

Tel: 01908 326944

**The NAS** - The NAS books are supplied by Central Books. You can order online or by phone

Tel: 0845 458 9911

Website: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

**The internet book shop**

[www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

**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](http://www.mugsy.org)

A site set up by a parent [www.spdsupport.org.uk](http://www.spdsupport.org.uk) is very informative with lots of information from various sources (including relation to autism, ADHD); games, therapies, links etc. There is a forum for parents/carers too.

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://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.

ASC-US Inc (formerly ASPEN), an American organisation for ASD, [www.asperger.org/](http://www.asperger.org/)

An excellent site in the US on Asperger Syndrome which also has good links to other speech and language websites: [www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger](http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger)

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

**Cambian Education Services** 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](http://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](http://www.oaasis.co.uk). All sheets are checked annually, please ensure you have the current version.

**Note:** The OAASIS Information Sheets use 'he' 'his' 'him' rather than the cumbersome 'he / she' 'his / her' 'him / her'. No sexism is intended.