



## How to Model Social Language

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Learning language is a wonderful journey that begins at birth and proceeds at high speed during the first five years of life. The desire to communicate and connect with others is as much a social process as a language-learning experience. Learning to use language as a tool for thinking and communicating is one of the most important developments of the early years. Interacting with others in effective and appropriate ways is a vital part of the growth process through which young children become competent adults. Developing good social language skills is an important step in the language learning journey.

### What is “Social” Language?

During their first five years, children go from making the *sounds* of language to organizing those sounds into words that have *meaning*. Eventually the words get put together into sentences that are *grammatically* correct. Well before the fifth birthday, sentences are organized into paragraphs. Using these sentences to communicate with others in an effective and appropriate manner is sometimes known as *social language*. Although gaining social language skills is a complex task, most children do it easily. They receive help from their parents, family members, and friends, who provide the necessary language examples as well as lots of communication practice. Children who are successful in learning social language become aware of social rules and then shape their language to become *competent communicators*.

### What is Communicative Competence?

An important part of social language learning is to understand how to carry on conversations. Language is a tool for communication, but communication is more than just talking. It is a two-way social system for connecting with others. It is sometimes done without using any words! A baby communicates needs or feelings by crying or smiling. Sometimes communication is accomplished through body language or sign language. Being a *good communicator* means gaining skills to make language appropriate for the listener or the situation.

### What skills Are Necessary to Be a Good Communicator?

Good communicators have an understanding of what is being said to them (*receptive language*). They are also able to deliver a message and get their meaning across to others (*expressive language*). Other skills which are necessary for good communicators to develop include the ability to *start* and *continue* a conversation by *taking turns*, as well as the ability to *provide*

*information* and *change the topic*. Social language skills also involve knowing how to *ask questions*, how to *ask for help*, and how to *express feelings*.

Perhaps the most difficult social language skill is to *change language* or adapt it to make it appropriate for the listener and the circumstances. It is through listening to others model correct social language that children learn how to speak in different ways to different kinds of people and to change their tone according to the setting. Instruction and modeling help children learn how to appropriately *greet* others, *excuse themselves* when they have violated a social rule, or *avoid embarrassing* others or hurting their feelings.