



# Speech-Language Pathology

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## Teaching Kids to “Read” Social Situations

Children and adolescents experience many different social situations every day. For each one, he/she needs to decide what to do. Children decide how to act in a social situation by analyzing many parts of it. For example, children often pay attention to where a situation is taking place and what the people are saying and doing. Because we never know exactly what someone else is thinking, we are always making our best guess about what is happening in a situation and what we should do. Deciding what to do in a situation with peers is even harder, since many of these situations are new to the child, and children sometimes try to mislead their peers.

Children with social language disorders miss some of the information that they need to respond to the situation effectively. There are many different reasons for this. Sometimes they have trouble understanding the words that others are saying. Other times, they have trouble interpreting what the person is doing. Missing important information can lead to inappropriate behavior. We can teach children how to get the information that they need in order to “read” social situations more effectively. Here are the important parts of social situations:

### To “Read” a Social Situation, Teach Your Child To Pay Attention To:

- The location / setting / context / situation (e.g. classroom, church, restaurant, home, etc.)
  - **Think about:** Are there specific rules about how to behave?
- The *words* that the person is saying.
  - **Think about:** Do you understand them? Are they nice words?

- The *face* of the person
  - **Think about:** Is the person smiling (happy); crying (sad); frowning (sad or angry)?
  - **Think about:** What is he/she doing with his face? (e.g. rolling eyes; mouth open or closed)
- The *gestures* of the person—what he/she is doing with his/her hands, arms, legs
  - **Think about:** Is the person pointing at something? Are the person's fists clenched? Did the person stamp his/her feet?
- The *body language / posture* of the person—What he/she is doing with his body.
  - **Think about:** Are the person's hands on his/her hips (angry)? Is the person hunched over (sad)?
- The *person's tone of voice*
  - **Think about:** Is the person speaking loudly or quietly; quickly or slowly? Does the pitch of his/her voice change a lot when the person speaks?

### Put It All Together:

- Do the person's face, gestures, body language, and tone of voice match? Do each of these things tell you the same emotion?
  - **Think about:** The person that you are interacting with. If you know him/her think about your past experiences with this person. Has the person been nice to you in the past? Does this person usually tell the truth? Can you trust him/her?