McGinnis Pragmatic Skills Checklist

What Are Pragmatic Skills?

Pragmatic skills facilitate our social interactions. We use pragmatics to get various social communication accomplished—we attend, request, tell, clarify. We also adjust our messages based on our knowledge of the situation and the participants involved. Children begin to learn social rules of communication very early, for example, seeking and maintaining eye contact during interactions in infancy. They learn to communicate their knowledge of the rules non-verbally at first, and then add verbal expressions as their language develops. Social conversational rules vary according to cultural group norms. There are conversational cultural rules for children, peers, adults, and other group identities, such as language, country or disability (e.g., blind, autistic). We compare a child's skills to what would be age-appropriate behavior, so evaluators must be familiar with the norms for a child's culture.

The pragmatic skills below are based on work by various researchers (e.g., Michael Halliday, John Searle, Paul Grice, Emanuel Schegloff, Harvey Sacks, William Corsaro, Elinor Ochs, etc.), are not exhaustive, and are listed in approximate developmental order. When assessing children's pragmatic skills, it is important to observe their behavior in many different contexts, with different social/conversational partners, since flexibility in using pragmatic rules is critical for conversational competence.

Checklist (*Non-verbal examples of expressing each skill are listed first; verbal is listed second.*)

Pragmatic Skill (*with Non-Verbal and Verbal Examples*)	Date	Non-Verbal	Verbal	Comments
1. Maintains appropriate eye contact e.g., initiates/maintains eye contact during interactions e.g., initiates/maintains eye contact during conversations				
2. Indicates agreement or disagreement e.g., shakes head or nods e.g., shakes head or nods while saying "yes" or "no"				
3. Uses appropriate facial expressions e.g., expression matches emotion conveyed e.g., expression matches emotion conveyed in words				
4. Uses appropriate social distancing e.g., maintains distance from strangers e.g., uses indirect requests vs. direct requests for children				
5. Uses appropriate physical posturing e.g., faces speaker, makes appropriate facial expression e.g., faces conversational partner when speaking				
6. Shows awareness of time, place, environment e.g., stays close in public places e.g., whispers in church/library vs yells at party				
7. Shows awareness of social relationships e.g., different behavior for stranger vs. friend e.g., marks adult status by using formal address: "Mr."				
8. Shows awareness of other person's world knowledge e.g., clarifies with gestures if person can't see referent e.g., "See that dog—the one with the big bow?"				
9. Uses appropriate greetings, pre-closings, closings e.g., smiles, waves bye-bye e.g., "hi, how are you? what's your name?" "gotta go..." "later"				

Pragmatic Skill (*with Non-Verbal and Verbal Examples*)	Date	Non-Verbal	Verbal	Comments:

10. Uses natural gestures
    e.g., points to referent
    e.g., incorporates natural gestures into conversation				

11. Changes intensity and intonation of voice
    e.g., uses high pitch when playing with babies
    e.g., uses intensity/intonation to stress a word in a sentence				

12. Indicates existence
    e.g., points to lost object when he finds it
    e.g., "there it is"				

13. Indicates location
    e.g., points to object when asked for it
    e.g., "it's behind the couch"				

14. Indicates disappearance
    e.g., raises hands to side and looks around for lost object
    e.g., "no more" "all gone" "where is it?"				

15. Indicates cessation
    e.g., gestures/quiets body, indicating something stopped
    e.g., "it stopped"				

16. Gives object
    e.g., hands object to person
    e.g., "here it is"				

17. Gives information
    e.g., through gestures
    e.g., "Daddy's working"				

**18. Indicates when another makes a
        mistake**
    e.g., covers mouth/laughs, looks shocked
    e.g., "uh-oh!" "look what he did!"				

19. States rules
    e.g., shakes head/finger if someone spills something
    e.g., "first take a bath, then watch TV"				

20. Makes choices
    e.g., points to desired object
    e.g., "I want chocolate"				

21. Calls for attention
    e.g., taps, tugs
    e.g., "Mommy!"				

22. Answers/acknowledges
    e.g., turns when called
    e.g., "what?" "huh?"				

23. Provides feedback/phatic comments
    e.g., nods head as speaker talks
    e.g., "yeah" "ok" "uh-huh"				

24. Takes turns
    e.g., in activities, games, interactions
    e.g., repeats adult words for a turn, or offers own				

Pragmatic Skill (*with Non-Verbal and Verbal Examples*)	Date	Non-Verbal	Verbal	Comments
25. Establishes joint referent e.g., shows object, ensures partner is looking at same object e.g., "see that ball over there? no--the <u>red</u> ball..."				
26. Initiates conversation e.g., points to a sc... Pragmatic Skills e.g., "know what?"				
27. Requests object/action/information/permission e.g., shakes empty box, looks up with questioning expression e.g., "help me" "do that" "gimme" "who's that?" "where is it?"				
28. Comments on object/action/information e.g., points to mushy banana, makes raspberry sound and "yuck" expression e.g., "pretty flower" "fast car" "I don't wanna go"				
29. Denies/protests/disagrees e.g., shakes head as peas are put on his plate e.g., "not me" "that's wrong"				
30. Makes predictions e.g., pantomimes falling when asked "what will happen if you run?" e.g., "maybe it's too small" "I think it will be cold"				
31. Expresses feelings/needs/problems e.g., taps diaper to indicate it needs to be changed e.g., "I'm hungry" "he hit me"				
32. Offers help e.g., offers a hand when another falls down e.g., "want my cup?" "take my bike"				
33. Consoles e.g., offers a hug to comfort crying child e.g., "what happened?" "that's ok"				
34. Pretends e.g., dresses up as daddy and pretends to go to work e.g., "I'm the Monster!"				
35. Deceives e.g., switches desserts with playmate when he isn't looking e.g., "I didn't do it--he did"				
36. Shows sense of humor and imagination by joking e.g., puts milk in cupboard instead of fridge and laughs e.g., "knock-knock, who's there?"				
37. Requests clarification e.g., gives a puzzled, questioning look e.g., "what did you say?"				
38. Responds to request for clarification e.g., uses gestures or shows what he means to clarify e.g., "I said. .... " repeats or rephrases what he said				
39. Maintains conversation (3+ exchanges) e.g., passes toy back and forth to partner while playing e.g., "wanna be the mommy?" "then you get sick" "I'm the doctor"				
40. Tells stories e.g., combines gestures, mime, vocalization to tell story e.g., "Daddy went fishing--he caught a big fish"				

Pragmatic Skill (*with Verbal Example*)	Date	Verbal	Comments
41. Labels objects e.g., "ball" "airplane"			
42. Plays with language and sounds e.g., "daddy-waddy-maddy", and other sound play			
43. Talks about talking (metalinguistics) e.g., "you talk too fast" "you talk funny"			
44. Tells/appreciates linguistic jokes e.g., Knock-knock jokes			
45. Boasts e.g., "I'm a big boy" "I can do that"			
46. Teases/insults e.g., "you're a baby!"			
47. Negotiates/asserts rights/argues e.g., "but you said I could" "that's not fair"			
48. Uses politeness markers e.g., "thank you, Ms. Jones" "you're welcome"			
49. Uses language appropriate to situation/people present e.g., does not discuss personal matters with strangers			
50. Provides contingent responses e.g., response is related to the topic at hand, and the preceding turn			
51. Provides sufficient (not too much or too little) information e.g., does not give long explanations for a quick question			
52. Gives names to people and animals e.g., "that's my dolly—Anita"			
53. Enters peer play space/routine appropriately e.g., enters nonverbally, then offers variant of play theme			
54. Asks appropriate conversational questions e.g., "are you the baby's mommy?" "what's the baby's name?"			
55. Gives explanations/directions e.g., "I couldn't do it cuz I'm too little" "Put my dolly in the basket"			
56. Changes topics appropriately e.g. "Remember Grandpa--Is he coming tomorrow?"			
57. Marks new/old information with "a" or "the" e.g., I found a book yesterday, but it's not the book you wanted			

Pragmatic Skills Bibliography

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