# How Can We Encourage Kids to Think Critically?

Exploring Mindful Use of Language By Parents and Professionals

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#### A moment in time...

# Individuals with social communication difficulties have core areas of challenge

- Seeing the big picture
- Reading nonverbal communication
- Problem solving in real time
- Taking the perspective of others
- Self-regulating/impulse control
- Being flexible

Let's develop these areas!

Here are FIVE foundation skills that we can work on.

Are you ready...?

#### 1. Improve Observation Skills Visual Referencing, Using Our Senses

- · Know what to observe
- Observe more often
- Understand or derive meaning from what we see and hear
  - Verbal
  - o Nonverbal
  - o Contextual information

### 2. Use Episodic Memory

- Access prior memories that are relevant to the here and now
  - o Have I encountered a problem like this in the past?
  - Of the solutions I know, which is the best for the problem I have right now?
- Store important memories for future retrieval
  - o What could I remember to do next time this happens?

# 3. Appreciate opinions and be comfortable with different perspectives

- No one has to be right or wrong.
- Different opinions can exist in the same space.

#### 4. Feel okay making mistakes

- Take small risks and try new things
- Become comfortable with uncertainty
- Develop resilience

## 5. Think in alternatives and possibilities Think Flexibly

Appreciate that there is always more than one way to do something

### Here's the good news!

Declarative language is a GIFT we can give to our students within each interaction that will help develop these areas.

#### But first... imperative language:

- · Questions or directions with a right/wrong answer
- Not flexible
- Doesn't give information, just "gets"
- Places demands on student to perform
- Not Experience-Sharing in nature
- Tells people what to do or say

#### Examples of imperative language

- Get in line.
- What color is your shirt?
- Say hello to Grandma.
- · Look at me.
- What did I say?

#### What exactly is Declarative Language?

- · A comment
- · Thinking out loud, sharing your inner voice
- Invites Experience-Sharing and observation
- Does not place demands
- Flexible many possible responses
- Encourages "seeing the big picture"
- Empowers!

Imperative	Declarative
Get in line.	Hmmm it looks like it might be time to go to lunch.
What color is your shirt?	We have the same color shirt. I like red too!
Say hello to Grandma.	Oh look! Grandma is here.
Look at me.	I'm worried you might miss something if you don't look.
What did I say?	I'm wondering if you heard what I said.

Declarative language is a really powerful tool!

We just have to try it, trust it, and be patient.

Declarative Language - Nuts and Bolts

May be a simple comment that observes:

- The dog looks hungry.
- Those flowers are really colorful!

Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts

Can include first person pronouns that emphasize *my* thinking or *our* togetherness:

- I wonder if your friend likes pretzels.
- I want to read this book to you.
- We had fun yesterday!
- Let's go get **our** shoes.
- The teacher is waiting for us.

Freddie and Desmond – thinking about our shared space

video

#### Declarative Language - Nuts and Bolts

Can include cognitive (or "thinking") verbs:

- think.......Hmmm... let me think about that.
- hope...I hope you will play too.
- remember, forget ....I remember last time this happened we...
- decide
- wish ...... wish it wasn't raining!
- wonder.... I wonder what we need now.
- · know/don't know

Noah and Ben (age 5) – becoming curious and interested about the thoughts of others

video

#### Declarative Language - Nuts and Bolts

Can include words that emphasize uncertainty, possibility and alternatives:

- maybe.....Maybe your friend wants to play too.
- perhaps
- might....We might go to the store later.
- · possibly
- sometimes
- sure/not sure...That's a great question! I'm not sure.

#### Declarative Language - Nuts and Bolts

Can include observational words or words related to our senses:

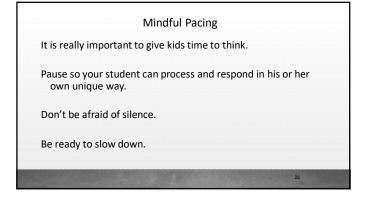
- notice...... I notice everyone is ready for our story!
- see
- hear ...... I heard your friend ask for a cup.
- smell
- feel..........I can tell your Mom felt upset about that.

Lena (age 4) – taking perspective

video

Harry (age 7) and Mom - sharing our opinions

video



Troubleshooting
But what if it doesn't work...?!

Troubleshooting — Our Declarative Language Toolbox

Get closer

Wait a bit longer

Add a gesture

Secure child's attention first

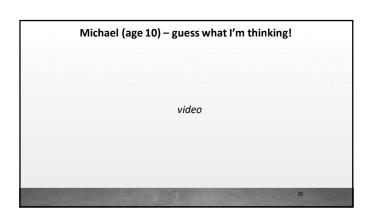
Tap shoulder, call name

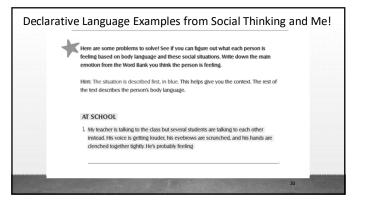
Remove distractions

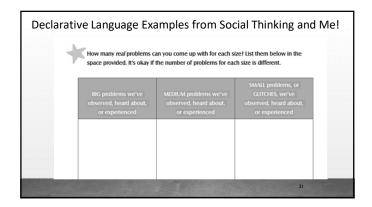
Give more information (not less)

I notice all the kids are lining up .... I think that means it's time for lunch.

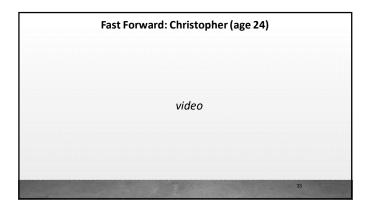
Don't give up!

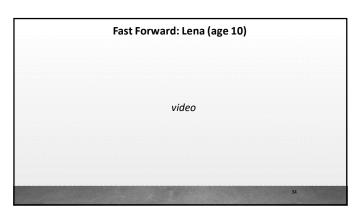












Back to the cereal...

Ready now for a challenge?
Turn these into declarative statements!

Go get your backpack.
Ask your friend what she wants to play.
Sharpen your pencil.
Stop making those noises!
Tell your friend your name.

#### Declarative Language Pilot Project

an invitation for interested parents

- Get trained in declarative language use
- Be part of an exciting pilot project to gather information related to this effective and underused strategy
- See flyer for more information!

#### Let's Empower Our Kids!

Social Thinking and Me!

How We Use Language and the Language We Use

I Get It! -- Audra Jensen

Articles on my website to print and share:

- Sept. 2015 blog entry: Declarative Language
- The Critical Importance of Declarative Language Input for Children with ASD. Autism Spectrum Quarterly, Winter 2010
- Thinking Beyond Eye Contact. Autism Spectrum Quarterly, Winter 2012

### Thank you for your time!

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