



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...

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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

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Let’s develop these areas!

Here are FIVE foundation skills that we can work on.

Are you ready...?

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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
 - Nonverbal
 - Contextual information

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2. Use Episodic Memory

- Access prior memories that are relevant to the here and now
 - 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
 - What could I remember to do next time this happens?

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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.

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4. Feel okay making mistakes

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

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5. Think in alternatives and possibilities
Think Flexibly

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

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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.

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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

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Examples of imperative language

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

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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!**

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Imperative

Get in line.

What color is your shirt?

Say hello to Grandma.
Look at me.

What did I say?

Declarative

Hmmm... it looks like it might be time to go to lunch.
We have the same color shirt. I like red too!
Oh look! Grandma is here.
I’m worried you might miss something if you don’t look.
I’m wondering if you heard what I said.

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Declarative language is a really powerful tool!
We just have to try it, trust it, and be patient.

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Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts

- May be a simple comment that observes:
- The dog looks hungry.
 - Those flowers are really colorful!

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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**.

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Freddie and Desmond – thinking about our shared space

video

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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*I wish it wasn’t raining!*
 - wonder.... *I wonder what we need now.*
 - know/don’t know

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

video

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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.*

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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.*

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Lena (age 4) – taking perspective

video

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Harry (age 7) and Mom – sharing our opinions

video

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Mindful Pacing

It is really important to give kids time to think.

Pause so your student can process and respond in his or her own unique way.

Don't be afraid of silence.

Be ready to slow down.

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Troubleshooting

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

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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!

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Michael (age 10) – guess what I'm thinking!

video

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Declarative Language Examples from Social Thinking and Me!

1. Fill in the blank: Using our social memory means that we're using our brain to _____ things about people and situations.
2. Agree/Disagree: It's a good idea to use your social memory of others when you're with them.
3. Agree/Disagree: Social memory helps us remember what other people like and don't like.



Read the following social thoughts in the left column. Draw a line from that thought to the social memory it goes with best.

SOCIAL THOUGHTS

You think your teacher is nice.

SOCIAL MEMORIES

At dinner last night, she pushed her plate away

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Declarative Language Examples from Social Thinking and Me!



Here are some problems to solve! See if you can figure out what each person is feeling based on body language and these social situations. Write down the main emotion from the Word Bank you think the person is feeling.


Hint: The situation is described first, in blue. This helps give you the context. The rest of the text describes the person's body language.

AT SCHOOL

1. My teacher is talking to the class but several students are talking to each other instead. His voice is getting louder, his eyebrows are scrunched, and his hands are clenched together tightly. He's probably feeling _____.

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Declarative Language Examples from Social Thinking and Me!

 How many *real* problems can you come up with for each size? List them below in the space provided. It's okay if the number of problems for each size is different.

BIG problems we've observed, heard about, or experienced	MEDIUM problems we've observed, heard about, or experienced	SMALL problems, or GLITCHES, we've observed, heard about, or experienced

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Christopher (age 21) - it is never too late to use declarative language!

video

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Fast Forward: Christopher (age 24)

video

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Fast Forward: Lena (age 10)

video

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Back to the cereal...

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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.

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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!

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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

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Thank you for your time!

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