

All the latest on what's happening in the world of autism, Asperger's and sensory issues!



DEVELOPING SOCIAL LANGUAGE THAT IS MEANINGFUL – PART 2

Article By Linda Murphy, MS, CCC-SLP

Award-winning magazine! *Proven success for 20 years*

**CLICK HERE
TO SUBSCRIBE**



Available at
amazon

[http://autismdigest.com/
subscribe-now/](http://autismdigest.com/subscribe-now/)

Call now
800.674.3771

Available on the
App Store

Developing Social Language that is Meaningful – Part 2

By Linda Murphy, MS, CCC-SLP



The importance of sharing personal memories.

In part one of this article in the February 2019 magazine, the idea of using memories to guide your students and children to make authentic and meaningful social connections with others shows sharing personal memories and experiences with others helps to develop relationships over time. You start by sharing yourself, searching for connections as well as interesting differences. Over time, however, you begin to create shared memories and a shared narrative together, which becomes the foundation of a relationship or friendship moving into the future.

memories, and serves as a language model. Once the child adds a thought, then you can add another that is connected to what they have said, pause again, and so on. As you continue to talk in this manner, you are modeling narrative language that the child can use later with a different communication partner, and you are further solidifying the actual memories. If adding an entire statement is too challenging for the child, start by pausing just before the end of your statement for him to simply chime in with one word. Start where the child is, setting them up for success.

Sharing memories as partners also creates a positive experience for both parties, in contrast to the laborious task of recall that question asking alone

if you do too" instead of "Tell Daddy what happened at the store." The invitational nature of these declarative statements, in comparison to the more demand-based nature of questions and commands, does a few important things.

First, by using the verb "remember," you are engaging the brain in a different way than when you ask a fact-based question. In the latter, the child may respond with a word, but may not mentally travel back in time. However, when you actively recall memories, you usually bring images and past sensory experiences into your present state of mind. This is what you want kids to be able to do. By framing your probe in this invitational way and by actively naming what you are doing

"Don't ask questions. Make 'shared' statements!"

Five tips around how to help kids go beyond the superficial language of scripts and niceties in order to share themselves in the past, present and future is important. As promised, here are tips five through ten!

Tip 5: Share memories in partnership. When you feel ready to scaffold your child's expression of a personal narrative, start by sharing memories as a team. Be sure to use an event or moment that you have experienced together, versus one where you were not there, so that you are sure of what transpired. Make the first statement and then pause to allow the child an opportunity to "hop in" with a connected thought. Ending your statement with a playful pause or a linking word such as *then*, *and* or *next* can serve as a cue for the child to continue the thought you have started.

Your initial statement is helpful because it will introduce the context to the child, likely trigger his own

often becomes. Kids and adults enjoy being partners in this storytelling process, because it connects them on an emotional level and is safe. It is safe to not remember everything, because, maybe, your partner will remember what you don't, and your story builds as you work together. Importantly for kids with social learning challenges, this process also emphasizes the social nature and importance of memory sharing with other people.

Tip 6: Be invitational when probing recall. Don't ask: *wonder what they remember.* When probing what the child might recall or remember on their own, rather than asking a "wh-" question or placing a demand, invite the child to remember with you by making declarative statements* that include the word *remember*. For example, you might say, "I'm wondering if you remember..." or "I remember something interesting that happened at the store! I wonder

("remembering"), you are helping the individual appreciate and understand the process on a higher level.

Second, because this type of statement is invitational, it is not a demand. The child is more likely to feel at ease, and feel comfortable asking for help or stating when they don't know the answer or don't remember what is being asked. For example, if you say: "I'm wondering if you remember who we saw at the store," the child might feel more comfortable stating, "No I don't remember" than if you directly asked, "Who did we see?" Thus, even when they don't remember something, you are helping him internalize and use this important vocabulary word to reflect his own thought processes.

Additionally, because so many of our kids with social learning difficulties fear being wrong or worry about situations where they are less certain, you want to thoughtfully design communication so it is safe

"Bring images and past sensory experiences into the shared memories."

for them to not know something. You want them to learn that asking for help leads to a positive social experience. Declarative statements reduce pressure and, therefore, anxiety, and create a situation where open dialogue and vulnerability are more possible.

**For more information on declarative language, see the article What We Say and How We Say It Matters in the Fall 2018 issue of Autism Asperger Digest.*

Tip 7: Connect the dots. Kids with social learning challenges cannot always generalize or see patterns across situations, which may make it hard for them to initiate or join an ongoing conversation. Mindfully make statements that help the child recall his own related experiences and make connections to similar but different conversational topics or events happening in the present. Use language that emphasizes memory and observation to bring attention and awareness to this process. Here are some examples:

Your friends are talking about the zoo. I remember we went to the zoo last summer.

I remember we've been to a store just like this one before.

The smell of this candle reminds me of the beach!

I notice this classroom looks a lot like the one you were in last year.

Tip 8: Help your child out with others! When someone inevitably asks your child an open-ended question and they appear stuck, get right in there and scaffold for them by sharing your knowledge of the event

using statements that begin with "I remember." Don't ask more questions! For example, if a neighbor asks your child what they did on vacation and your child doesn't answer, help them out by saying "I remember you really liked swimming in the pool." Your statement will likely then trigger additional memories in your child, which they may then spontaneously share. If they don't, it's okay! Pick out a few meaningful memories and make declarative statements to share aloud alongside your child in one of the ways listed above. In doing so, you are thoughtfully modeling language and helping to create your child's personal narrative for the future and helping them be ready the next time someone asks a similar question.

Tip 9: Create a "moments" journal. Remember, the things you want kids to hold onto and share later aren't a list of specific events but, rather, the small but meaningful moments along the way. Capture these moments by taking snapshots or videos on your phone and be sure to go back later and remember the moment together. Include the small but meaningful moments of joy, excitement, wonder, and laughter. You can also include frustrations as a means of reflecting and problem-solving outside of the moment, and moments of sadness to remember how they felt comforted and recovered. With the child, pick out a notebook or simple journal to use. Periodically paste in pictures, draw quick sketches, or jot down a few words related to these moments. If you are using a

tablet, there are apps, such as Mental Note, which allows you to include videos in your journal. Include future happenings as well to get in the habit of looking ahead!

Tip 10: Let go and trust the process. As you begin to incorporate this shift in speaking style to support your child or student to store and recall socially meaningful memories, remember to be patient. You are planting seeds of thought and working to create new patterns that don't develop overnight. As you thoughtfully model how to share memories, keep in mind that this is a process that feeds forward. Letting go of the need for an immediate response from the child is important work to do.

Final Thoughts

When you are present in the moment, thoughtful in the language you use, and mindfully allowing processing time, the child will truly experience the sharing of memories as a positive social exchange. Your goal is to help kids walk away with well-formed memories related to their own personal narratives, to understand and better express who they are as individuals, and to find joy in sharing memories with others. Share information generously, wait quietly, and scaffold as needed. From this place of support, the child will be equipped and open to engaging with others in more meaningful ways in future conversational opportunities. ■



Linda Murphy, MS, CCC-SLP, is involved in Peer Projects Therapy From the Heart in Beverly, MA 01915. The advice is in this column

is the product of her and her colleagues' therapeutic program. Their site is www.peerprojectstherapyfromtheheart.com.