



What We Know About Typical Social Language Development

As of yet, there is no well-recognized, research-based, developmental model for children learning social interaction skills. A review of the literature and the research from the Social Language Development Test Elementary reveals the following information about the development of social language functioning of typically-developing students.

1. Infants respond to others' facial expression and tone of voice (Flin & Dziurawiec, 1989).
2. Joint attention skills are typically mastered by 18 months (Baron-Cohen, 1995).
3. Children as young as 20-24 months can express and/or label internal states (e.g., happy, sad, good, bad) (Bretherton, McNew, & Beeghly-Smith, 1981).
4. Children between the ages of 24 and 36 months talk about their thinking with words like *think*, *remember*, and *know* (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982).
5. By 36 months, children can infer happy (Hadwin & Perner, 1991).
6. Preschoolers can listen to a situation and predict the emotional reaction and facial expression a person will display (Denham, 1986).
7. Between the ages of 3 and 7, children begin to tell white (prosocial) lies. This increases with age as children understand that the blunt truth can hurt others and prosocial lies are expected (DePaulo & Bell, 1996; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998).
8. Four- and five-year-olds use words that refer to mental states:
 - modulating an assertion – *I think it's a dog.*
 - expressing a desire – *I hope we have pizza.*
 - direct interaction – *I guess I'll go outside.*
 Later, these words are used for direct reference to mental/emotional states – *Before I thought this was a crocodile; now I know it's an alligator* (Shatz, Wellman, & Silber, 1983).
9. According to Hadwin & Perner (1991), at about age 5, children infer complex expressions, such as:
 - surprised – happy surprise, a shock, or sudden discovery
 - sad versus mad
10. Kindergarteners know:
 - they have their own thoughts/feelings
 - other people have different thoughts/feelings that can be inferred from facial expressions and nonverbal cues
 - how to be friendly
 - what embarrasses others
 - how to please others
 These skills continue to be refined throughout their school years (Bowers & Huisingsh, 2008).
11. Between the ages of 6 and 8, children can:
 - tell which person in a photograph shows a particular emotion, label the emotion, and make a face to show an emotion
 - interpret a common gesture, such as a shrug to mean "I don't know," and use nonverbal language/gestures to send a common message, such as "Come here" (Bowers & Huisingsh, 2008)
12. Six- to seven-year-olds defer judgment or decision-making to an authority versus taking responsibility to resolve a conflict themselves (Bowers & Huisingsh, 2008).
13. Students from 6.0 – 11.11 years give more desirable responses to test items when the situations involve a friend rather than a sibling. Students show less compassion and more dominance in conflicts with siblings than they do with friends (Bowers & Huisingsh, 2008).

Bowers, L., Huisingsh, R., & LoGiudice, C. (2008). *Social language development test elementary*. East Moline, IL: LinguSystems, Inc.