What's typical talk at secondary?

This poster gives information to teachers about language and communication development in secondary pupils. It may help teachers identify those pupils who have an underlying speech, language and communication need.

Language development in the secondary years is a gradual process with many subtle but important changes taking place.

For further information and advice visit: www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Pupils may fail to develop age appropriate language skills for a range of reasons including:

- They may have general learning difficulties
- They may have had less support at home to develop their language and communication skills fully
- They may have a specific difficulty with language which is out of step with their potential to learn
- Children with English as an additional language are at the same risk of speech, language and communication needs as any other child, however, this can be more difficult to spot.

Hello – a year to help all children communicate – talk·listen·take part

I can helps children communicate – REGISTERED CHARITY 210031

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Understanding & reasoning

Pupils use language to solve more complex problems

By Age 11

- Can follow complex directions:
  Get the rectangular box that's on the bottom shelf of the stationery cupboard.
- Understands common, simple 'sayings' in context:
  I couldn't keep a straight face.
- Starting to get someone else's point of view when discussing
- Understands factual information. Still finds it harder to understand inferred information:
  What is said: Getting noisy in here...
  What is implied: ***You need to be quiet.***
- Starting to understand sarcasm when exaggerated:
  You're such a talented singer...

By Age 14

- Understands instructions which don't follow the word order of the sentence:
  Before you collect your instruments, complete the worksheet and file it in your folder.
- Can build an argument to persuade and respond to views different to own
- Separates fact from opinion when reading
- Makes inferences, working out information that isn't explicitly written or spoken:
  The day was dark and thick coats were required.
- Understands less obvious 'sayings',
  You're skating on thin ice.
- Confident in noticing and understanding sarcasm with clues

By Age 18 onwards

- No difficulty following complex directions
- Knows when and why they don't understand; asks for help in a specific way:
  Can you explain that to me again? I got the beginning but I don't understand the last step.
- More skilled in using a range of arguments to persuade others
- Reads and understands a wide variety of topics
- Fully understands sarcasm and is able to use it well:
  I'm so happy to see you.

Vocabulary

Pupils learn approximately 7 to 10 words per day

By Age 11

- Instruction words are hard to understand: **Estimate • Research**
- Understands some words have multiple meanings: **Hot • Bright**
- Beginning to use 'dictionary type' instead of 'personal' definitions to explain words, for example **'Brave'**
  Dictionary: ***When you do something even though you're scared.***
  Personal definition: ***When I fall over and don't cry***
- Uses more interesting vocabulary when prompted: **'Worried' becomes 'Anxious'**

By Age 14

- Still challenged by some instruction words: **Modify • Generate • Consider**
- Uses patterns in words that: **-able, -esque, un-, dis-**
- Uses 'academic words' when prompted to all formal tasks: **Agitated • Arrogant • Excruciating**
- Can confidently explain the meaning of subject words and words with multiple meanings

By Age 18 onwards

- Knows what these instruction words are asking them to do: **Evaluate • Find themes • Compile**
- Uses a good range of descriptive words and expressions: **Swaggered • Noxious • Meandered**

Sentence structure & narration

Pupils can explain more complex ideas

By Age 11

- Uses a range of joining words in speech and writing: **Because • So • Also • Before**
- Tells interesting, entertaining and original stories with stories within stories
- Explains the rules of a game or a sequence of events in a simple but accurate way
- Average length of spoken sentences = **7 to 11+ words**

By Age 14

- Links sentences using more difficult joining words: **Even though • However**
- Produces well-planned, complex stories with complete sections and plenty of detail
- Gives clear and detailed explanations of rules, or breaks down steps in more complex sequences
- Average length of spoken sentences = **7 to 12+ words**

By Age 18 onwards

- Is able to use difficult joining words to make complex sentences: **Provided that • Similarly**
- Can tell long and complex narratives ensuring the listener understands the thread of the story throughout
- Average length of spoken sentences = **9 to 13+ words**

Social interaction

Uses sophisticated language skills to be successful socially

- Understands jokes based on double meanings though isn't always able to explain them:
  I said to the Gym instructor, "Can you teach me to do the splits?" He said, "How flexible are you?" I said, "I can't make Tuesdays."
- Adjusts the politeness of their language to who they are talking to:
  Soz mate...chill man.
  Sorry Mr Jones I didn't mean to make you angry.
- Is able to talk through problems with peers
- Is aware when someone doesn't understand and tries another way to get information across
- Moves from topic to topic quite often in conversations

- Understands and uses slang terms with peers; keeps up with latest 'street talk'
- Can keep a topic of conversation going even if the person they are talking to finds this skill harder
- Fully understands the difference between talking with peers to speaking in the classroom:
  I use bigger and posher words in school than with my mates.

- Able to stay on one topic of conversation for long periods and move sensibly from one topic to another
- Able to switch easily between informal and formal styles of talking depending on the audience:
  Off to college now for an interview. Seeing my mates later...Better watch my mouth with Sam's mum - was a bit rude last time.

This poster is based on research evidence and professional experience, cited in Nippold, Marilyn A. (2007) Later Language Development: School-age Children, Adolescents, And Young Adults. 2nd ed. Publ. Pro Ed.