

Idiomatic Expressions, Humor and Sarcasm in Social Settings



By looking closely at the comic above you can pick up on visual cues which make the joke funny. In order for this joke to be funny, a person should be able to notice that the dog is green, and wagging its tail rapidly with a rabid smile and wide eyes. You should also be able to notice that the man in the picture is scared by looking at his body language. It is as if you can hear in your head how he is saying the above statement with pure fright. People with higher level language difficulties might not be able to pick up on all the clues in the picture that make the joke funny. Higher level language refers to abstract thinking, problem solving, metaphors, and the like. It includes components of language that go beyond the basic mechanics. It is the nuances and subtleties of everyday language. If a person has difficulties understanding sarcasm and humor, they might miss much around them in their daily environment.

“Take everything she says with a grain of salt.” “She has a green thumb.” “It’s raining cats and dogs out there.” We have all heard these expressions at least one time in our lives. You can instantly draw the meaning from those sentences. The world around us is filled with figurative language. TV sitcoms, advertisements, jokes, poems, movies, riddles, and newspaper comics are some examples of everyday experiences in which a person encounters humor, sarcasm, metaphors, similes, etc. However, someone with a language disorder might have difficulty in truly understanding the real meaning behind these statements. These individuals might comprehend these statements literally. A

middle school or high school student might encounter these figurative expressions in an English class when interpreting the metaphors and similes in a poem. These students will have a difficult time in understanding the meaning behind those statements which in turn can lead to misunderstanding the poem as a whole. For this group of people, socialization is extremely important. Having a language disorder can make relating to peers difficult. At this age, adolescents begin to use sarcasm, jokes and inferences in their everyday conversation. A literal interpretation of these expressions can cause the individual to feel they are not part of the group, as they may interpret jokes or sarcasm inappropriately.

It is extremely important, especially for middle school and high school students, to receive language therapy from a speech-language pathologist in order to improve their higher level language skills. By improving this area, they will have an increased understanding in academics as well as in their social circles.

Center for Speech and Language Pathology