

## Playing with Words to Address Social Understanding

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When my deafblind student, Gabby, needed help understanding why it was important for her to wear a belt, her intervener, Mr. Bryan Gonzalez, suggested that I write a story for her in which Petey the Cat needed to wear a belt. Petey is a character from a book series that Gabby likes and whom we've played with a lot in the long *Dogman* story that she and I have written together. In my mind, this story is a hybrid between the *Dogman* story that incorporates the playing with words techniques and a social story. I wrote most of this story and left space at the end for Gabby to participate. My recollection is that I was much less flexible about letting her say whatever she wanted, as I would in the *Dogman* story, because I felt it was important that she understand that she needed to wear a belt. This story was fun to write together. Gabby liked the pictures of the plumber's crack that I inserted in the middle of the story. Gabby's mother, Ms. Robbie Caldwell, said that the story helped Gabby understand the perspective others regarding her pants.

The story was originally written in black font. For the purposes of reader understanding, I have changed what I wrote to blue font and kept Gabby's writing black. My comments are in boxes like this:

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| Jay's Comment: |
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# Gabby Helps Petey with an Important Problem

Here I tried to set up the situation in an entertaining way that was not a lecture and not shaming.

Petey, Dogman and Gabby were hanging around the dorm. They were talking and eating popcorn when Petey dropped some popcorn on the floor. “Oops,” he said, “I better pick that up,” he said. And he bent over to pick it up. When Petey bent over, his pants slid down so that you

could see his bottom. It looked like this:



Gabby and Dogman both saw it. They looked at each other. They were horrified, upset, embarrassed and grossed out.

That was a private part of Petey's body. Petey was naked in front of them. He shouldn't be showing his bottom to other people.

Dogman thought, 'This is really embarrassing. I don't want Petey to feel bad. I don't want Petey to feel ashamed. But somebody needs to tell him to pull up his pants. I hope Gabby will do it.'

Gabby was thinking ‘Yuk! I don’t want to see that.’

Petey finished picking up the popcorn. He could see from Gabby and Dogman’s faces that they were upset. He said, “What’s wrong guys?”

Gabby explained, “ Petey. I am upset about your bottom. I will pull up the pant and I got the belt.”

Below, I wanted her to demonstrate understanding that she knew why he needed a belt. Possibly, I could have left well enough alone.

Petey did not understand. He felt confused. So what if his pants fell down every once in a while. Why were Dogman and Gabby so upset? He told Gabby, “Stay away! My pants are fine. Why is it important for me to wear a belt. I don’t understand. I don’t get it.”

Gabby said, “ it holds up your pant and not fall down.”

Petey said, “My pants falling down does not bother me. Why do you care?”

Maybe she was tired of the discussion and wanted to move on.

Gabby explained, “ Because you are right. Your pant are fine.”

Just then, Angelica came in.

She was only 7 years old. She saw Petey’s bottom looking like this:





She screamed. “I can see Petey’s bottom. Gabby do something about your cat. That is gross!” Gabby said, “I handle it!” Gabby put the belt on Petey’s pant. Petey said, “This is not that bad. Now I can bend over and nobody can see my bottom. I have my privacy.”

Angelica gave Petey a kiss between the ears. She said, “Now it is nice to be around you Petey. Please do not be naked around me anymore. It embarrasses me.”

Petey said, “Thank you. You’re sweet Gabby’s sister.”

Dogman gave Petey a high 5. “Way to go Dude,” he said.