

Conversational Skills - Teenagers

Some students need to be taught the 'rules' of conversation as they don't pick them up automatically. These 'rules' include how to greet people, ways of handing over or ending a conversation, or how to tell if the other person is interested.

These rules need to be demonstrated and acted out with the student. Then they will need lots of encouragement to use the 'rules' in real life.

NOTE: with all of the games and activities below, make sure an adult/good role model takes the first turn to show the student what to do. You may need to show them several times and use visual and verbal prompts.

Starting a Conversation

Joining in

In pairs/threes, ask the students to role-play ways of joining in simple games or conversations about set topics.

Talking with objects / photos / pictures

- ⇒ Ask the students to bring in an object / photo / picture from home.
- ⇒ Encourage them to show their object to the group and to say a little bit about it.
- ⇒ You model asking a question about their object e.g. 'Who is your favourite character in the movie?'
- ⇒ Let the students have a turn asking you, or each other, a question about the topic.
- ⇒ You could also model an inappropriate approach, e.g. 'Give me that rabbit!' and talk about how that was said.
- ⇒ Then let the student help you to ask more appropriately.



Seeking Help

Role-play ways of asking for help. Set up situations or activities with one thing missing, e.g. no pencils/crayons out on the colouring in table, the student then has to directly ask for help.

Silence

Sit and say nothing – make the students start off a conversation with you. This will feel strange at first but it is a good way to teach the student that they can start a conversation.

Keep the Conversation Going

Talking too much

Remind the student that their conversation partner needs to have a turn to talk too or they might get bored. Keep asking the student how they think their partner feels.

Talking too much about their interests

When a student talks too frequently about a specific topic, make a rule about when that topic can / cannot be introduced into conversation.

Use a clear signal, such as a picture cue, gesture or code word, to remind the student.

Changing the topic of conversation

If a student changes the topic of conversation, it might be because they don't fully understand or they have made inappropriate connections in their mind. When this happens, gently refocus them and remind them how their conversation partner feels when they start talking about something different.

Asking repetitive questions

At times, a student may ask repetitive questions as because they are anxious or because they want some control over the conversation.

If they keep asking irrelevant questions, don't answer them explain why it is irrelevant explain when a good time would be to ask that question.

Following on

Show students how to use what their conversation partner says, to carry on the conversation. e.g. Partner says 'I went to the cinema yesterday.' So the student could say 'Did you have a nice time at the cinema?' or 'What did you see at the cinema?'

What's Changed?

- ⇒ This is a group role play activity.
- ⇒ You ask one of the students a question.
- ⇒ The student answers.
- ⇒ You give no response to what they are saying, just sit there looking blank. Ask the students to tell you how you were behaving.
- ⇒ Now repeat the activity but this time nod, ask questions and show interest in what the student is saying.
- ⇒ Ask the students to tell you what changed between the first and second role-plays and identify which role-play is best and why.
- ⇒ Make a list of the best ways to keep a conversation going.



Go Mad!

Discuss with a group all the ways we let people know we are interested in what they are saying, e.g. nodding, verbal fillers, smiling etc.

Write down their suggestions on pieces of card and ask the students to talk to each other in pairs.

Encourage them to 'go mad' and, using the cue cards to remind them, overact the different ways of showing interest with each other.

Giving Relevant Information

General Strategies

- ⇒ Students may give unnecessary information or leave out important details during conversation.
- ⇒ This is because they have little or no insight into the listener's level of knowledge.
- ⇒ Tell the student what else you need to know if they have missed something out e.g. Say, "I don't know who this happened to" or "I haven't been to your house so I don't know what your garden is like"
- ⇒ Help your student to recognise unnecessary detail they have given by explaining why there was no need for it to be included e.g. "I was at the cinema with you yesterday so I know that you saw that movie and enjoyed it. You could tell Mr Jones; he doesn't know because he wasn't there."

Barrier Games

- ⇒ Using felt tipped pens, draw some simple shapes in different colours.
- ⇒ The shapes must be in different positions on the sheets of paper and must be easy to describe.
- ⇒ Show the picture to student 1.
- ⇒ Student 1 has to tell student 2 how to draw the picture without showing it to them. At the end see if they look the same.

Describing games

- ⇒ Students choose an object/picture of an object from a bag.
- ⇒ They must then describe the picture without showing it to the group.
- ⇒ The group must guess what the picture is.

Who am I?

A student picks a picture of a famous person/fictional character and give the group clues so the group can guess who it is.



Interrupting

Group Rules

- ⇒ In a group, make a rule that the only person who is allowed to speak is the person holding an object (e.g. bean bag).
- ⇒ Explain to the student that pauses in conversations are the times to speak.
- ⇒ Video clips are useful to practise recognising pauses.
- ⇒ If they continue to have difficulty knowing when to join in, adults can use a signal to help.

When a student interrupts

- ⇒ Remind them they need to wait for you to finish talking
- ⇒ Finish your conversation quite quickly
- ⇒ Then talk with the student. You can gradually extend the time you keep your student waiting but at first keep to a few seconds only. Give lots of praise when they have succeeded in waiting and remembered their request.
- ⇒ Visual cues are good at reminding a student to take turns in class, put their hand up etc.
- ⇒ They find it difficult to monitor their behaviour 'on the spot' and a visual cue is a gentle reminder.

Discussion Points

- ⇒ Discuss how people can show that they are waiting to talk.
- ⇒ Discuss how and why people interrupt appropriately e.g. to give an urgent message.
- ⇒ Discuss why someone says 'Excuse me' or someone's name when they want to talk to them.
- ⇒ Discuss what might happen if they touch someone or pulled their clothes to get attention.

Rule Sheet

Create a rule sheet on the computer. Write a series of sentences based on the discussion Points. e.g. 'When we want to speak to someone we say...'

Role Play

Role-play inappropriate interrupting behaviour for a group of students. Ask the students to spot what is wrong and how it could be put right, e.g. if you pull someone's clothes to get attention the student could tell you to say 'excuse me'. Get two adults to role-play talking non-stop. Students have to try to stop them using appropriate ways of interrupting.

Conversation turns

Students have a discussion in a circle. You unravel the wool and pass it from speaker to speaker. At the end the students observe the pattern made – who had no turns (no wool) and who had lots of turns (lots of wool).



Conversation Repair

Nonsense!

- ⇒ The students have to suggest ways to repair conversations. You could start to talk but sometimes use nonsense words in sentences. The student has to recognise and respond when they do not understand what has been said.
- ⇒ You could deliberately misunderstand a student and they have to repair the breakdown in communication.

Can You Spot it?

Show a video/role-play of a breakdown in a conversation. Students have to suggest strategies to repair the breakdown. It could be a video of the group having a chat and use this to reflect on the conversation afterwards.

More Information

You could give the student an instruction with inadequate content, e.g. 'Give me the thing'. The student has to recognise and identify that they cannot respond appropriately.

Ending a Conversation

Role Play

- ⇒ Students can find closing a conversation difficult.
- ⇒ Explain that they can't just walk away from a conversation but that they need to give some indication that the conversation has finished.
- ⇒ Act out the right way and the wrong way to close a conversation.
- ⇒ Help the student to identify the differences.
- ⇒ Model the correct way to do it and encourage them to copy you.

Brainstorm

- ⇒ Talk to a group about the different ways that we let people know that the conversation has ended. Include phrases like:

'Is that the time, I really must be going.'

'I didn't realise it was so late.'

'Oh well, I suppose I'd better go now.'

'Mum's waiting for me.'

'Nice to see you.'

It's been great talking with you.'

'I'm going now.'

'I must dash, bye.'

Have a discussion about the phrases. Discuss body language such as looking at your watch, picking up books and papers.