

Autism: Attacking Social Interaction Problems

**A Therapy Manual
Targeting Social Skills in Teens**

4

Just Do It: Initiating Conversations



RATIONALE

With teens we assume that the basic skills for school success are in place; however, the social educational demands increase yearly, thus requiring refinement of these skills and greater awareness of social expectations as well as increased independence. The following lessons are designed for teens 13 to 16 years of age, to teach and reinforce the social skills of initiating conversations. These lessons will build upon the basic skills of making eye contact, paying attention, and active listening.

SKILL STEPS FOR INITIATING CONVERSATIONS

- Politely gain attention
- Make eye contact
- Extend a greeting

LESSON 1: INITIATING CONVERSATIONS TO MAKE FRIENDS**Activity A: Social Chat**

Starting a conversation is a skill that can be used to make new friends and can be a valuable social tool for the rest of your life. It is important to have several examples of conversation starters ready for any situation. During *social chat*, the group leader should ask the teens the following question: “Which of the following are good ways to start a conversation? Why or why not?” Give examples of good and bad conversation starters like: “You’re stupid!” “Bye!” “Good to see you.” “Hi.” “How are you doing?” “Get out of my seat!” and “Excuse me.” The group leader should talk about the importance of basic conversation skills like turn-taking, observing personal space, being aware of body language, topic maintenance, using appropriate voice inflection, voice tone, and rate of speech, and active listening. These skills may be written on a poster and displayed in the room. Ask the teens to discuss how absence of each of these skills can cause the conversation to go wrong. Practice conversation starters in the following role-play situations.

Activity B: Role-Play

The teens in the group should take turns in pairs and demonstrate one of the situations below. The other group members should evaluate the role-play, using the evaluation form below. Remind teens to remember their skill steps. Following each role-play, the teens should discuss the evaluation ratings they gave for each student in the skit and why. Additional situations may be added by the group leader.

1. Your brother got the latest video game for his birthday. You really want to learn to play this game. Demonstrate how you would start a conversation with your brother to ask him to teach you how to play the game.
2. Today is the first day at your new high school. Your first class is physical education, located in the gym. Demonstrate how you would start a conversation with a classmate to ask for directions to the gym.

3. Your mother's car is being repaired and today you have to ride the school bus for the first time. Demonstrate how you would start a conversation with the student sitting next to you on the bus.
4. You are shopping for a new shirt in a popular store. You found two that you like and you need a second opinion to help you decide. Demonstrate how you would start a conversation with another teen in the store to ask his opinion about the shirts.
5. You arrive at a park where several games of basketball are being played by teens and you want to play. You walk up to one of the teens who is watching the game from the sidelines. Demonstrate how you would start a conversation with the teen to find out when you can get a chance to play in one of the games.

Evaluation of Role-Play for Initiating Conversations

Rate each student in the role-play skit demonstrated using the following scale:

0 = Did not demonstrate; **1** = Poor use of conversation starter;

2 = Below average use of conversation starter; **3** = Average use of conversation starter;

4 = Above average use of conversation starter; **5** = Excellent use of conversation starter.

Student # 1: _____ **(Name)**

Student # 2: _____ **(Name)**

_____ **Use of personal space**

_____ **Use of personal space**

_____ **Turn-taking**

_____ **Turn-taking**

_____ **Eye contact**

_____ **Eye contact**

_____ **Topic maintenance**

_____ **Topic maintenance**

_____ **Good listening**

_____ **Good listening**

_____ **Body language**

_____ **Body language**

_____ **Voice inflection**

_____ **Voice inflection**

_____ **Volume of voice**

_____ **Volume of voice**

_____ **Rate of speech**

_____ **Rate of speech**

_____ **Use of conversation starters**

_____ **Use of conversation starters**

Total Score _____/50 _____

Total Score _____/50 _____

Comments: _____

Comments: _____