

Having a Conversation

Tips for Teachers

The Main Event

This month our topic is **Having a Conversation**. In this issue, Patricia Cretella, a speech-language pathologist and autism consultant, is our guest author; she has written The Main Event.

Good ideas for teaching students to better understand these social concepts include:

- Talk about how some “rules” are not written down but they are still important as “rules for success”
- Pair off students and have the student pairs think about what they know about each other (use some of the helpful hints from the article).
- Have students list things their parents and brothers and sisters like to talk about.
- Have students practice with a partner taking turns talking about favorite things.
- Assign students to ask people around the school what they like to talk about. Make a chart of people and favorite topics.
- Role-play the wrong way of conducting a conversation: How does it *feel* to be cut off or not asked about your favorite things?

I am Kari Dunn Buron,
a teacher from Minnesota,
and I just love this magazine!



You betcha.

Departments

I Second That Emotion!:

This issue's scale is a friendship scale.

- Have students fill out their personal scale with at least one name per level.
- Have the class make a list of what kinds of information you might talk about to a #5 person on the scale that you would not share with a #4 person.
- Discuss with students whether they thought this was an easy activity or a hard activity.

Coming to Our Senses:

This topic is called Bus Rides and was submitted by Shelly Schmidt, an occupational therapist.

- Ask students if they take the bus.
 - If so, discuss whether they have ever had any problems riding on the bus.
 - If they do not take the school bus, ask if they ever taken public transportation?
- Based on their experiences with buses or other types of public transportation, make a list of good things to include in a "bus, busy bag."

Gets-It Knows!:

- Discuss how manners change over time due to science or trends in society.
- Generate a list of manners that seem to have been forgotten (taking hat off inside, interrupting by taking a phone call).

Something to Talk About:

- Discuss the distinction between a lie and a "white" lie. Make a chart and put different examples in different columns depending on whether they are lies or white lies.
- Ask if anyone has ever told a white lie. Why and what was it?
- Explain that having a "theory of mind" refers to the ability to understand and care that other people have their own perspectives, inner thoughts, and feelings. White lies are things we do to protect our friends' inner thoughts about themselves.

The Cartoon:

(NOTE: The abstract nature of the cartoon is purposeful. Social rules and faux pas are subtle, and this activity gives students and opportunity to analyze the social information, point by point. It is expected that the teacher or group leader will support the discussion using the following prompt questions.):

- Ask students if they think the people are on a train or airplane? Does it matter.
- Discuss what is happening in the cartoon.
- Explore what social rule is being broken.
- After you get some guesses about this, talk about the man's "topic." Is it a good one to have with a possible stranger?
- Have everyone look at the man with the book. What do students think he is thinking?
- Explore how the story would change if the old man were the younger man's father.

Contributors to This Issue

Patricia Cretella is a speech-language pathologist and autism consultant for School District #622 in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has been teaching social language skills for students with ASD for over 10 years. Patricia also teaches a communication class in the autism certificate program at Hamline University and is a member of the Minnesota State Autism Network.

Shelly Schmitt has been a school occupational therapist for 10 years, 9 of them with people with autism. She worked for Intermediate School District Northeast Metro 916 in Minnesota for eight years, before taking time off to stay at home with her daughter. Shelly has also worked for six years at Camp Discovery, a summer camp for youth with Asperger Syndrome.

Having a Conversation

Teacher Handout

Understanding and addressing problems of *conversation* in students with social cognitive problems:

Having a social conversation is a two-way deal. Two or more people talk to each other in a give-and-take interaction. One person says something, and then another person responds with a related comment, and so on and so on. For a person with social cognitive problems, this can be difficult.

Your student with a social delay might want to talk to other students but may not understand those unspoken “rules” of social conversation. He might talk in a monologue style about his favorite topic without realizing that the other person wants a turn. This behavior has the unfortunate consequence of turning other students, and even some teachers, off. They might think the student is self-centered or arrogant because he only wants to talk about things that interest him and never asks questions about the other person’s interests. Truth of the matter is that the student with the social cognitive problem does not understand another person’s desire to participate in the conversation.

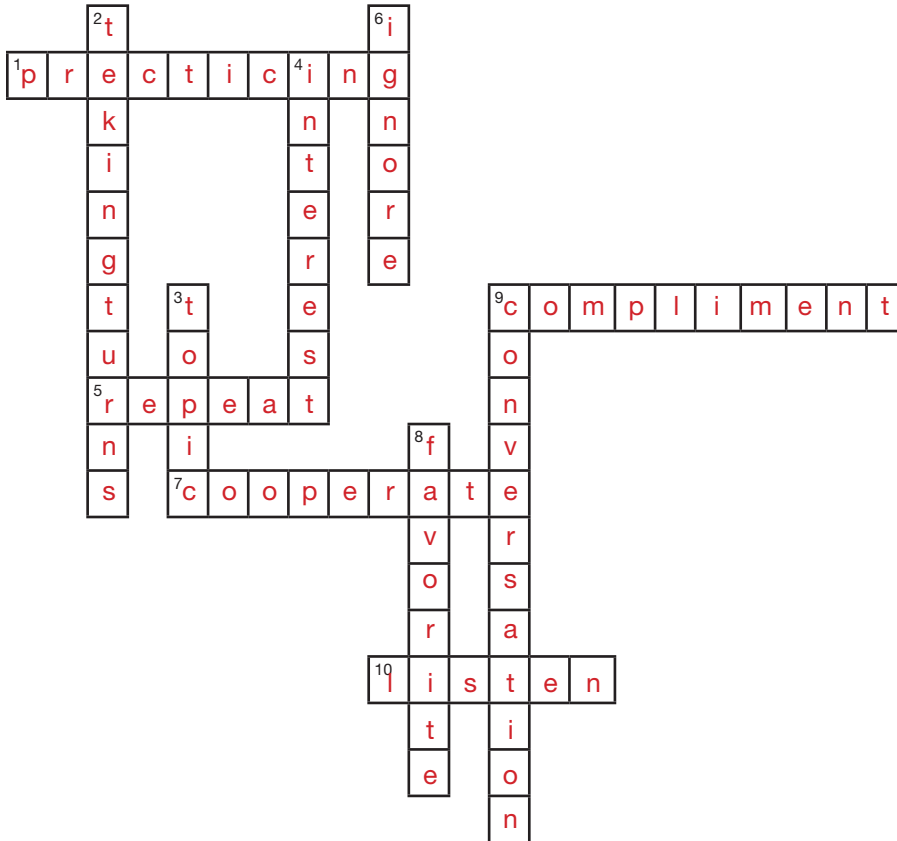
- **Be patient with the student who approaches you often to tell you all about a topic of his interest or facts about a favorite subject.** This might be his attempt to be social. As the adult in the room, you are the safest person to talk to if he has been rejected in the past by his peers.
- **Remember that conversation is a skill, and without these skills your student cannot succeed.** He might need extra practice. Practicing with you might be the safest format. Let him talk about something of interest to him and then instruct him to stop and ask you a question about your interests. This might seem unnatural at first but become more comfortable as you practice.
- **Teach your student the difference between “lecturing” and “conversing.”** A friend of mine who has autism told me that she and her boyfriend (who also has autism) don’t really have conversations; they have mini-lectures. She lectures a bit, and then he lectures a bit. This is typical for students who do not have a natural sense of conversation.
- **Understand that you might be your student’s closest conversational friend.** In order to learn positive social skills, we all have to engage in positive social interactions. If your student has not found success with peers, you might be the one person who can support this skill.

Having a Conversation – Word Search Answers



Word Bank: COMFORTABLE, CONVERSATION, FRIENDLY, IGNORE, MOVIES, MUSIC, PRACTICE, RUDE, STARTERS, TEAM, TIPS, TOPIC

Having a Conversation – Crossword Answers



ACROSS

- 1) studying; trying something over and over to get good at it
- 5) doing something over again
- 7) working with another person while respecting their ideas
- 9) something you say to make someone else feel good
- 10) when we stop talking and attend to what the other person is saying

DOWN

- 2) two words: sharing time in a conversation
- 3) a category of something to talk about
- 4) something you might like to talk about
- 6) to pretend someone isn't there
- 8) as in "that is my _____ band"
- 9) a talk with another person

Having a Conversation – Quiz

Name: _____

- 1) True or False? When people have conversations they actually follow rules.
 - A) True
 - B) False

- 2) True or False? A good person to have a conversation with might be someone who has been rude to you.
 - A) True
 - B) False

- 3) True or False? An important rule in conversation is that you cannot only talk about your own interests.
 - A) True
 - B) False

- 4) Which of the following might not be considered a good topic for starting a conversation?
 - A) The other person's favorite sports team
 - B) The other person's family vacation
 - C) The other person's favorite band
 - D) A video game you both enjoy
 - E) Your favorite Civil War battle

- 5) Ending a conversation can be tricky. Which of the following is a good way to end a conversation.
 - A) Just walk away, the other person will figure it out.
 - B) Say, "OK, I have to go now, see you later."
 - C) Stop talking and look away until the other person walks away.
 - D) Start talking about a topic the other person isn't interested in.
 - E) Say, "I have better things to do, goodbye."

- 6) Which of the following is not a good conversation skill.
 - A) Asking the other person questions.
 - B) Listening to the other person's response.
 - C) Talking really loud.
 - D) Taking turns during the conversation.

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