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Introduction

Learning Interactive Conversation Skills

Originally titled the Eagle Project for Conversation Interaction Skills, this program is an exciting self-paced method for teaching proactive talk. It was named Eagle Project because it turns its participants into high-soaring, independent leaders in the art of conversation. These 50-plus self-managed lessons constitute a course that has consistently amazed teachers and parents with positive results after only 12 weeks of training. In a world where etiquette, warmth and friendliness are on the wane, this course sets a new standard for initiating appropriate greetings, questions, and comments. When adult vocational instructors viewed videotapes of our field-testing, they remarked, “this kind of training would be helpful for everyone!”

While proactive social skills are necessary for all of us, they are particularly vital for people with cognitive disabilities. In addition, during an era in which the practice of traditional social skills has fallen on hard times, for students with disabilities to achieve a basic mastery of these skills gives them a leg up in the real world. Employers and others who will work with and relate to your students after high school will be positively impressed with them and are likely to go out of their way to help them succeed. There may be no better skill area to work on with your students than the **Conversation Skills** taught in this book.

These user-friendly lessons are designed to be implemented by classroom teachers, speech and language pathologists and vocational instructors. Students of varying abilities can learn to break the ice with engaging greetings and appropriate questions on a day-to-day basis. The simple-to-use sheets promote social integration and help students to make new acquaintances and lasting friendships.

Instructors need only to spend as little as 10 minutes twice weekly to teach these invaluable speaking skills. Participants role-play with the teacher, each other, and high profile peers in order to master simple phraseology that makes them the principle initiator of conversations. Students simply mark their self-managed sheets and report back to the classroom group weekly. Reinforcement is given through periodic reviews, certificates of achievement, and structured group commendation. In a short period of time, even nonreaders can use the meaningful graphics to remember techniques that enable them to socialize with peers, coworkers and neighbors. **Communication Skills** repertoires have been mastered by people of all abilities and are especially effective for those who have severe, moderate and mild developmental disabilities. The course is designed to help students practice skills across the environment and has been proven to provide a lasting bank of social tools for their future.



Instructors need only to spend as little as 10 minutes twice weekly to promote social integration and help students to make new acquaintances and lasting friendships.

Conversation Skills helps you answer the following questions and accomplish the following goals:

Why do students need social skills on the job?

Studies have repeatedly shown that young people with mild and moderate developmental disabilities do not initiate conversations and frequently exhibit behaviors that isolate them on the job. These young workers with developmental disabilities are often not fully integrated with other workers with whom they coexist. They often remain passive in conversations and forget to initiate greetings, comments or questions.

Notably, it has been pointed out that while most workers without disabilities lose their jobs for reasons of character, people with disabilities lose their jobs for social reasons. One of the goals of this program is to give a social booster shot to your students to immunize them against this outcome.

What skill sets does Conversation Skills teach and how?

Through guided practice and repetition, it provides young people with disabilities with a whole new set of social-communicative skills—50 plus in all—which are generalized across all relevant environments through use of self-managed checklists that are an integral part of **Conversation Skills**. The practice of, and repetition on, each skill is delivered in the 50 Lesson Objectives while generalization of each skill is held accountable through the 50 Self-Managed Checklists on the back side of the Lesson Objectives. Note that Self-Managed Checklists are picture-cued for nonreaders and each skill has its own icon. Discuss this with students.

How does Conversation Skills training work?

Teachers need only to spend as little as 10 minutes, twice weekly, in teaching students the most vital social conversation skills for a work environment. Virtually all lessons include suggested student role-plays with the teacher and each other in order to learn simple phraseology that allows them to be the initiator of conversations and provides them with a repertoire of conversation. Repeat these role-plays to the point of memorization. Periodic but simple Review Sheets reinforce learning and students are rewarded with Certificates of Accomplishment, included as reproducibles periodically throughout the book.

Who should participate in Conversation Skills training?

Students who need these 50 conversation skills. Using this program, essential, basic repertoires have been mastered by students with severe, moderate and mild developmental disabilities and they are the target users.

Each of the 50 **Conversation Skills** includes a Lesson page with a primary objective, a Self-Managed Checklist for the student on its reverse side, an occasional Review Sheet and periodic Certificates of Achievement.



*Students
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and provides
them with a
repertoire of
conversation.*

Each lesson follows this structure:

Rationale:

The reason why students need to know this skill.

Objective:

Their goal in learning it.

Methods:

How you teach it.

Extra practice:

Additional helpful exercises.

Assignment Sheet:

Homework to help secure student acquisition of the skill.

Debriefing Session:

A reinforcing session to confirm that students have done their homework assignments and a review of the previous week's lesson.

Self-Managed Checklist

Found on the following page. Checklists help students to chart their success and progress with the skill of the week. Directions are at the top of each page and are self-explanatory.

Tinted areas indicate where the coworker or others should circle yes or no.

Lesson 2 Objective
Learn the Names of Your Coworkers & Friends

Week 1 – Day One

Rationale:
Too often young people with disabilities neglect to find out the names of coworkers, schoolmates or community contacts. They need to learn the skill of being the first to introduce themselves.

Objective:
Students will build on lesson one by having a brief review of their skill sheets. Ask students how they introduced themselves. Clap for all students, even shy ones who might not have taken any opportunities to introduce themselves. This is important because they will come around after seeing others take the plunge. Students will now begin to find out names of people of coworkers, schoolmates, administrators and neighbors.

Methods:
Have students practice by introducing themselves to each other, saying their own first and last names and asking the other person's name. Make sure each person acts as the initiator at least once. They say, "Hello, my name is _____, what is your name?"

Extra Practice:
If time permits, have several high profile peers from a class nearby come in and allow students to practice. Students might also go to the administration office and practice the introduction and name gathering.

Assignment Sheet:
After role-playing, teacher passes out assignment sheet #2. Students are instructed to write their names and the date on the sheet. This is important because if sheets get dropped or lost, they can be returned to the individual. Explain the sheet to the group and have them mark the first line with the name of the person they either met in class, in another class or in the building. This exercise is even good for adult learners because many of us might not know the names of all the people we come in contact with daily. After all, what is the sweetest sound in the human language? Isn't our own name being used or called by someone? Remind students to use their own first and last names when they introduce themselves.

Week 3 – Day One

Debriefing Session:
Students have had two weeks of social interaction. They should be excited by now. Keep the momentum high now by offering small rewards for those who return sheets and have something written on them. Please refrain from scolding or taking anything away from those who are not in the groove yet. They will come around when they see others being commended and being successful. The whole group claps for everyone because these exercises are strictly voluntary and there is no right or wrong involved in this. Each person establishes his/her own norms. Encourage students to keep up the introductions as they meet new people. Remember they are trying to be the initiator in all exercises.

Lessons 5

Self-Managed Checklist

Lesson 20

Be the First to Ask Two Expansion Questions:

"Do You Have Any Pets?"

"How Many Pets do You Have?"

Student Name _____ Date _____

Be the first to ask your coworkers and friends if they have any pets and how many pets they have. After you ask the questions, circle a number and have the person write whether you were the first to ask the questions.

Do You Have Any Pets?

1 2 3 4 5

How Many Pets Do You Have?

1 2 3 4 5

1. Was the student the first to ask you the questions?	Yes	No
2. Was the student the first to ask you the questions?	Yes	No
3. Was the student the first to ask you the questions?	Yes	No



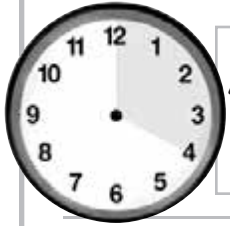
Main Features of Conversation Skills

- 50-plus self-managed lessons
- Covers the gamut of basic, necessary proactive conversation skills for a successful and fulfilling life in the community and at work
- Takes only 12 weeks of twice-weekly 10 minute training sessions
- Self-paced
- Involves hands-on role plays with staff and high-profile peers
- Students self-manage their accountability

Reasons These Skills are Vital for Students

- People with disabilities often fail to initiate conversations on the job, thereby isolating themselves
- Often those with developmental disabilities lose jobs because of social isolation, while nondisabled workers typically lose jobs because of character issues
- **Conversation Skills** gives students a ready and built-in social repertoire





**Time
Allotted:**
20
minutes

Lesson 1 Objective

Introduce Yourself

Week 1 — Day One

Rationale:

Young people with disabilities do not always take the initiative to introduce themselves when they meet new people.

Objective:

This lesson encourages students to introduce themselves first and to say their first and last names.

Methods:

Have the students practice introducing themselves by extending a hand and giving a firm handshake. Practice is done first with the teacher, then with each other. Students say, "Hello, my name is Jane Smith, what is your name?" After response, students say, "Nice to meet you."

Extra Practice:

Have a few students from a nearby classroom come into your room and encourage them to practice for 10 minutes with these peers. Students could also go to the administrative offices and introduce themselves to secretaries or administrators. Have the students report results to the teacher and to the rest of the class. Have students discuss their feelings about meeting new people and being the **first to say their first and last names**.

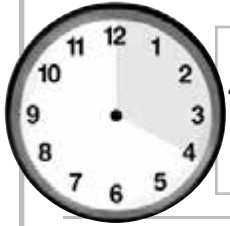
Assignment Sheet:

After role-playing, the teacher passes out assignment sheet #1. Students are instructed to write their names and current date on the paper right away and to keep this sheet in a folder or in a notebook that they keep with them at all times. Instruct them to circle a number each time **they are the first to introduce themselves**. The student must be the initiator with someone new each time and they must be sure to say their first and last names.

Week 2 — Day One

Debriefing Session:

Students report to the teacher and have a brief discussion of their results with assignment sheet #1. The teacher is to give positive feedback to all students and to refrain from reprimanding or scolding anyone who did not do the exercise. This is because the exercises are strictly voluntary and shy students tend to catch on as they see others receiving commendation. The whole group claps as each student gives experiences and shares the number of times they introduced themselves at work or in the community. Students are encouraged to keep up this practice in coming weeks as they meet new people. **Remind them that they are trying to be the first to say something in all exercises. Tell them that they are learning to be friendly at work and at school.**



Time
Allotted:
20
minutes

Lesson 3 Objective

Say Hello: Be the First to Say Hello

Week 3 — Day One

Rationale:

People with disabilities are often shy and lack the self-confidence to approach others and greet them. They are often "acted upon" in conversation and have learned to be passive or responsive to the greetings of others.

Objective:

Students will build on lessons one and two by being the initiator of greetings to people to give them a chance to practice their newly acquired skills. The more greetings they make, the better it is. They need all the practice they can get! This will help to make them stand out at work and in the community. If they remember the names of the people they met, that is a bonus, but the objective now is to get as much practice as possible in being the first to say hello.

Methods:

The teacher asks students to practice being the first to say hello to classmates. They may expand on the hello (e.g., how are you?) but first need to go down the line and be the first to say hello to each classmate.

Extra Practice:

After everyone has had a chance, (about 5 minutes) have students go down the hall of the building initiating hellos to all they meet. **This is difficult, especially if you have students who have a stuttering problem.** Please be patient and allow students to go at their own pace. Some might not do it and that is okay. This should be fun and not a chore. Commend all as they try or succeed. Even a good try is a success. **Try it yourself sometime. If you come within 10 feet of a person, be the first to say hello and you will find out how often we miss doing that.**

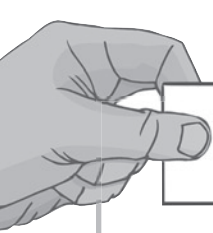
Assignment Sheet:

After guided practice and role-playing, have students sign and date the assignment sheet. Go over the assignment thoroughly and make sure students have pencils to carry with them and that they understand where to mark numbers of greetings. Greetings are especially important for the students with severe disabilities. They can do this too with training. If they can say hi, that is sufficient. If they have an augmentative communication device, program it and have them press the button for the greeting. Ask others who are around them if they used the greeting (e.g., bus drivers, other teachers, community helpers).

Week 4 — Day One

Debriefing Session:

Students report about their week of being the first to say hello. Excitement should be high since this was a one-word exercise! The teacher gives positive feedback as each one reports experiences, successes and fears. All should clap as each gives report. These sessions are very important because emotions are running high by now. Everything is voluntary and non-punitive. Students who forget to use the sheet should not be marked down. They will catch up as the momentum builds! Remember, everyone should have at least one circle on the sheet from the introductory practice. Students are encouraged to keep practicing in coming weeks as they meet new people. **Initiation is the key!**



Lesson 3

Say Hello: Be the First to Say Hello

Student Name _____ Date _____

Be the first one to say hello to the people on the job. Every time you are the first one to say hello, circle a number below. If you know the person's name, have them write their name below.

I said hello first:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Names of people I said hello to:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Skills Review

Introduce Yourself/Learn Names

Be the First to Say Hello/Greet Supervisor

Student Name _____ Date _____

Be the first to speak and circle each time:

Introduce Yourself

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Learn Names

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Be the first to Say Hello

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Greet the Supervisor/Manager

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Totals

Skills Review

Student Name _____ Date _____

Observer _____ Phase _____

Initiate Greetings	Initiate Questions	Initiate Expansions
Total	Total	Total

Comments



Lesson 8

"Do You Go To The Movies?"

"What Is Your Favorite Movie?"

Student Name _____ Date _____

Be the first to ask your coworkers and friends if they go to the movies and what their favorite movie is. After you ask the questions, circle a number and have the person sign on the line.

1 2 3 4 5

Names of people who told me they go to the movies and what their favorite movie is:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

