

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From ***What's the Buzz?*** A social skills enrichment programme for primary students

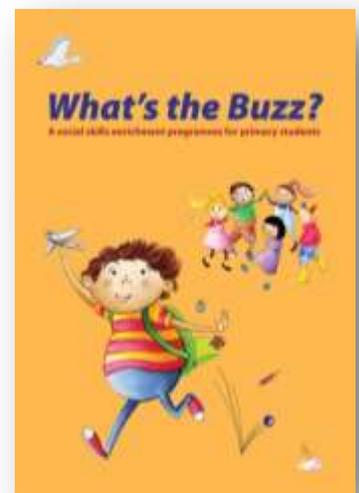


Lesson 14: the connecting art of conversation

In this lesson your child learnt the vital skills about the art of conversation. As well, they had an opportunity to practice.

What is interesting is that when these skills are broken down into individual components we quickly realize that conversation relies heavily on a myriad of small, intricate skills such as;

- timing
- looking
- listening
- physical proximity
- reading the body language of another
- judging their interest
- appropriate topic selection
- conversation connecting abilities
- compromise
- patience
- assertiveness
- confidence



With so many skills linked to good conversation, it is not surprising that for those already wrestling with one developmental issue or another, the art of conversation will take longer to master. Below is a selection of ideas for parents to develop their children's conversational skills.

Be the best role model you can

When your child converses with you try to display the simple things that you expect from them; stop what you are doing, give eye contact, listen carefully, respond to questions, connect ideas and exchange thoughts. As our children observe our well-developed conversational skills in action we positively drip-feed their emerging skills.

Make time for conversation

After all, practice makes perfect. Many families earmark an evening meal each day for this purpose, others make use of car trips or the time it takes to walk home from school or go to the shops. Try to create opportunities to converse; make them part of the daily or weekly routine.

The need to be deliberate

Children who are the focus of '*What's the Buzz?*' are dependent on precise training that teaches them how to think socially, and transfer that thinking into everyday practice. The deliberate guidance, coaching and development of foundation skills are crucial in order for some to achieve mastery. The action taken by James' parents in the case study below illustrates this very point.

Case study, stretching James' conversational skills

James was excitable and just wouldn't stop talking at the dinner table. Every evening he gave an exhaustive commentary on what had happened to him throughout the day. In the space of thirty minutes while his family sat eating, most of the talk time was commandeered by eleven year old James. But, a three minute timer changed this forever! There were five people sitting at the table, and talk time needed to be evenly divided to allow conversation. It was decided that each person had to be guaranteed three minutes of uninterrupted talk time. When it was not their turn, they could ask questions of the person speaking, and when they had nothing to say they gave the remainder of their time to someone else. The new system helped James to regulate his talk time, gave him opportunity to listen and ensured others had scope to participate. These days James is still long winded, but when his parents say - "summarise it James" - he understands.

Four ideas to raise your child's conversational skills

Idea 1

Go shopping with your child and purchase an inexpensive wallet Slip the 'conversational cards' from this lesson into it. Keep them in the two categories; 'conversational connectors' and 'conversational comments'.

To play take all the cards out and place them on the floor so you can both see them. Choose a topic and start a conversation. Have fun choosing card after card to help the conversation progress. Physically point to cards you think will be useful in keeping the conversation flowing. Occasionally, deliberately choose a card that you know will not work and see if your child catches you out by offering better advice. This is fun and the practice will assist them to build conversational flexibility and confidence.

Idea 2

In this week's lesson your child learnt the skills to make conversations sparkle. The positive steps on 'how to make a conversation sparkle' are in the lesson. Also in the lesson were a set of tips on 'Ingredients to wreck a conversation'.

Ingredients to wreck a conversation

- Constantly disagree
- Say mean things about others
- Go on and on about what you like
- Don't talk and don't join in
- Brag
- Be grumpy
- Interrupt
- Jump to new topics all the time
- Talk so much that others can't get a word in
- Tune out and walking away – that's rude!

We offer these as a discussion and reference point.

Idea 3

Every so often brainstorm the set of skills needed to maintain a sparkling conversation;

- timing
- looking
- listening
- physical proximity
- reading the body language of another
- judging their interest
- appropriate topic selection
- conversation connecting abilities
- compromise
- assertiveness
- confidence, and many more.

Display this list on a large piece of poster paper and fasten pictures from magazines to show the required skills. Place the poster on show for everyone in the family to see!

Idea 4

Sensitively arrange opportunities for your child to practice their new acquired conversational skills, especially when there isn't the pressure of making mistakes in front of peers. One idea may be to organise your child to catch up with a friend or relative who is sensitive to your child's needs. They might sit with your child and talk knowing your child is in the process of strengthening their conversational skills.



“A friend is one of the nicest things you can have, and one of the best things you can be.”

Douglas Pagels