

SOCIAL AND CONVERSATION SKILLS ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Initiation

Greetings: Discuss how you greet people and give examples. Show pictures of different people, e.g. police officer, interviewer, teacher, mum, baby, doctor, animals etc. Group members take it in turns to demonstrate to the group how they would greet that person.

Let me introduce you: The group divides into pairs. Each member should introduce themselves by name and make one positive self-statement, e.g. 'I am Ethan and I like playing the guitar'. Each pair should seek out another couple and introduce their partner saying their name plus the statement.

Draw a house: The group is divided into pairs and one member is to instruct their partner on how to draw a house. The person who is drawing should only carry out instructions given by their partner. When the task is completed roles should be reversed. To simplify instruct to draw a shape.

Desert Island: The group is instructed that each member is allowed one minute to think of three individual items that they would wish to have if they were stranded on a desert island. This should not include people or animals. The group is divided into pairs and each pair is to negotiate three items from the six they will have decided upon during the first part of the exercise. The group reforms to discuss how decisions were made and whether the members felt they had been able to express their views satisfactorily.

Who Am I? Labels are prepared. The name of a famous person is written on each label, e.g. pop star, sportsperson. The labels are attached to each group member's back without them seeing what is written on it. The members of the group are then instructed to move around and ask each other questions to find out who they are meant to be. The questions should be closed and only require a 'yes' or 'no' response, e.g. 'Am I a man?' 'Do I play a sport?' When everyone has discovered who they are, the group reassembles to discuss any difficulties that they encountered.

The praise game: The group is divided into pairs and the members are instructed that they are to converse with their partner for five minutes. During the conversation they should praise or make a positive statement to each other. The group then reforms and each person is asked what praise they received and their partner is asked how they reacted.

Questions and answers: The group is seated in a circle and members are instructed that the leader will ask the person seated on their right a question, e.g. 'What did you have for lunch?' The question should be answered appropriately and that person then asks their neighbour the same question. The exercise continues until all group members have asked and responded to the same question.

What is my job? The group is seated in a circle and one member leaves the room. The remaining participants choose a job for that person and then invite them back. Each member of the group then asks the person a question as if they were interviewing them for the agreed job, without telling them what the job is, e.g. if the job chosen is fireman, the questions could be:

- Do you enjoy climbing?
- Do you like wearing a uniform?
- Do you enjoy driving fast?

The interviewee is to guess what the job is.

Topic management

Buzz it: Make some topic cue cards (e.g. school, holiday, favourite animal, TV etc) and place them in a bag. Take it in turns to pull out a cue card from the bag. Each person then has to talk for 60 seconds about the topic they have selected (time can be reduced to thirty seconds initially). The aim is for the person to talk only about that topic. If they begin to talk about something else other members of the group have to 'buzz' in. The topic cue cards can be shown to help keep the group focussed.

Comments and Question Time: One person in the group is required to make a comment, such as 'I like going shopping'. The rest of the group then take it in turns to make a related comment e.g. 'I hate shopping', 'My favourite shop is Topshop', 'I like going shopping with my friend'. Then the group think about questions that they would like to ask others relating to the comments e.g. 'What is your favourite shop?', 'Where do you like to go shopping?', 'Who do you go shopping with?'.

Guess what! Cards are prepared with written statements. The statements should be varied with both good and bad incidents, e.g. I have won a hundred pounds, I am going on a world cruise, My cat is ill, My car has broken down.

Each group member is given a card and one person is selected to read out the statement on their card. Each remaining group member is asked to make an appropriate response to the statement e.g., 'How awful!', 'You must be worried', 'You lucky thing!' When all members have read their statement and the group has responded, a full discussion should take place on how to respond appropriately to others' good or bad news.

30 Seconds: Group members sit in a semi-circle in front of you. They take turns to select an object from a bag containing familiar objects and have to talk about it for 30 seconds. Adult leader to time and say stop.

Proximity

Where do we stand? A selection of large pictures should be prepared, e.g. pictures of famous people, different types of food, places to visit, types of transport, etc. One picture is placed in the centre of the room. A member of the group is asked to position themselves in the room and adopt a posture and facial expression that demonstrates how they feel about that picture, i.e. stand far away from a picture of jelly with a look of disgust (indicating this

person dislikes jelly). The remaining group members should then describe what the position, body language and facial expression discloses about that person's feelings.

How close should we get? Cards are prepared describing scenarios relating to proximity in communication, e.g. comforting someone who is upset, how we talk to a stranger in a shop, talking to a close friend, speaking to someone in authority. The group are to guess what is happening. A discussion should take place after each presentation regarding proximity and factors which affect it. The group is seated in a circle and two members are given a card and instructed to position themselves in the appropriate way.

How do we look? The group is seated in a circle. The leader describes a situation, e.g., listening to music; cheering a football team on television; waiting to be interviewed. Members are instructed to adopt a position appropriate to each situation.

Advancing: The group stands in two lines on either side of the room facing one another. They are then instructed to advance towards one another and stop when they feel they are at a comfortable distance from their partner. Variations in distance between the pairs then observed and the group discussed appropriate proximity.

Interrupting

Who am I?: Each student picks a famous person/character. The rest of the group then ask questions to try and find out who the famous person/character is. Encourage good looking, listening, staying in topic, turn taking etc.

Interruption. The group is divided into sub-groups of three. The first member of the triad is instructed to engage in monologue for 30 seconds whilst the second member constantly interrupts. The third member is to observe how the first member reacts. All members take a turn in each role. The group then reforms to discuss turn-taking and repair of conversations. *To simplify the speaker is instructed to say only one sentence which the second member interrupts once.

Intonation / stress

Likes and dislikes: The group is seated in a circle and each member is instructed to take in saying one positive thing and one negative thing about food, e.g. 'I love peanuts but I hate olives'. Each person exaggerates the words 'love' and 'hate' using appropriate facial expression and tone of voice. The group then discusses how feelings are expressed both verbally and non-verbally.

Speak up: The group is divided into pairs. One partner is required to say 'Hello, my name is ...what is yours?' several times, varying their volume. The first time they should say it quietly, then repeat it, increasing the volume each time until they are shouting. The other person is required to listen and respond non-verbally according to whether it is too quiet, appropriate or too loud. Partners then change roles. The group then reforms and discusses appropriate volume and cues from listeners which are helpful in modifying volume.

How do I sound? Sentences are written on cards which will be used to demonstrate appropriate changes in volume of speech, e.g.

1. Could everybody please stop talking and listen for a moment?

2. Don't wake the baby
3. Could you turn the music down please
4. I think it has been a nice day
5. Isn't this lecture boring
6. Referee, that was not off side

Group members are given a card and asked to read the sentence using the appropriate volume. A discussion then follows on variation of volume according to the content of the sentence and the context in which it may occur.

What do we mean? The group is seated in a circle. A card with sentences written on it is passed around and each group member is asked to read the sentence changing the stress or intonation pattern, e.g.

- He did not want to eat his dinner
- He did not want to eat his dinner
- He did not want to eat his dinner
- He did not want to eat his dinner?

The group then discusses how intonation and stress affect the meaning of a sentence.