How Conversation Works

There are three stages to any conversation. First, there’s the beginning, when one person initiates the conversation. Then comes the middle, when both partners continue the conversation. Finally, the end requires one person to bring the conversation to a close. During each stage of the conversation, both people have much to do—not just when they’re speaking, but when they’re listening, too.

Good conversation consists of three parts: **Initiate**, **Continue** and **End**—which you can remember as “ICE.” To master conversation, your child needs to “break the ICE.”

Ways to INITIATE conversations

How do people actually start a conversation? Sometimes we do it without words. For example, we get our listener’s attention by looking him or her in the eye. Sometimes we smile. Of course, we use words, too. We can break the ice and begin the conversation with a standard greeting like, “Hi!” and follow with an easy-to-answer opening question, such as “How are you?” or “What’s new?”

After we greet someone, we might make a comment to get the conversation going. There are many ways to do this. For instance, we could pay someone a compliment, say something about what that person is doing or tell the other person something interesting about ourselves.

Consider how Emily gets off to a good start with Daniel:

**Initiates with words**

Emily gets her friend’s attention by using a greeting word (“Hey”) and then saying his name (Daniel). Next, she gives Daniel a compliment (“That’s a cool tower”).

**Initiates without words**

Emily stands near her friend, smiles and looks at him as she talks.

**Ways to Initiate Conversations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without Words</th>
<th>With Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use body actions, such as standing near the other person.</td>
<td>Use a standard greeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the other person’s face.</td>
<td>Use the person’s name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile at the other person.</td>
<td>Ask an easy-to-answer opening question, such as “How are you?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap the other person on the shoulder.</td>
<td>Make a comment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… and wait for a response.</td>
<td>• Give a compliment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Comment on what’s happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Share some information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>… and wait for a response.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Filling in the three checklists later in this chapter will help you figure out which part your child needs the most help with.

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How does your child initiate conversation? Remember, the way your child initiates conversations with you and other adults can be very different from the way he initiates with other children. For example, he might say, “Hi! How are you?” to his grandmother but greet his friend with a high-five. We’ll talk more about how children start conversations with other children in Chapter 10.

Using Conversation Checklist #1 below, decide how your child initiates conversation (or tries to initiate it).

### Ways to CONTINUE conversations

Once we’ve broken the ice by saying hello and asking an easy-to-answer question or making a comment, we have to keep the conversation going. Continuing a conversation means each person takes turns, with and without words.

Sometimes a continuing turn might only be a “filler,” something we say—like “uh-huh” or “mmm”—just to let the other person know we’re listening or agreeing. Most of the time, we continue conversations by answering and asking questions, making comments and looking interested when the other person talks.

To keep a conversation going, speaker and listener must stay tuned in to one another so each can connect his turn to the one before.

On the next page, take a look at how James and his mother keep their conversation going.

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How does your child initiate conversation? Remember, the way your child initiates conversations with you and other adults can be very different from the way he initiates with other children. For example, he might say, “Hi! How are you?” to his grandmother but greet his friend with a high-five. We’ll talk more about how children start conversations with other children in Chapter 10.

Using Conversation Checklist #1 below, decide how your child initiates conversation (or tries to initiate it).

### Conversation Checklist #1

#### Initiating the Conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY CHILD STARTS A CONVERSATION BY:</th>
<th>WITH WORDS</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>OFTEN</th>
<th>WITHOUT WORDS</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>OFTEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting someone’s attention</td>
<td>Says the person’s name</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Stands near the person</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Looks at the person’s face</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Taps the person on the shoulder</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example of how my child gets someone’s attention:

**Example:**

**Getting someone’s attention:**

**E.g., “Hi”**

- Faces the person
- Smiles at the person

Example of how my child greets someone:

**Example:**

**Greeting someone:**

- E.g., “Hi”
- E.g., “Hi. How are you?”
- E.g., “Hi. What’s your name?”
- E.g., “What are you doing?”

Example of some opening questions my child uses:

**Example:**

**Asking an opening question:**

- E.g., “Are you having fun?”
- E.g., “What do you like to play?”

Example of what my child says/does:

**Example:**

**Saying something nice:**

- E.g., “Cool truck!”
- Looks at the person when he says something nice and then waits

Example of what my child says/does:

**Conversation Checklist #1 continued**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking about something that will happen in the future</td>
<td>E.g., “I’m going to go to camp.”</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Looks at the person and then waits</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
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Example of what my child says/does:

**Example:**

**Talking about something that will happen in the future:**

- E.g., “I’m going to go to camp.”
- Looks at the person and then waits

Example of what my child says/does:

**Example:**

**Asking another about feelings, likes/dislikes:**

- E.g., “Are you having fun?”
- “What do you like to play?”
- E.g., “What’s your name?”

Example of what my child says/does:

**Example:**

**Asking another about feelings, likes/dislikes:**

- E.g., “Are you having fun?”
- “What do you like to play?”
- E.g., “What’s your name?”

Example of what my child says/does:

**Example:**

**Getting someone’s attention:**

**Example:**

**Greeting someone:**

- E.g., “Hi”
- E.g., “Hi. How are you?”
- E.g., “Hi. What’s your name?”
- E.g., “What are you doing?”

Example of some opening questions my child uses:

**Example:**

**Asking an opening question:**

- E.g., “Are you having fun?”
- E.g., “What do you like to play?”

Ways to CONTINUE conversations

Once we’ve broken the ice by saying hello and asking an easy-to-answer question or making a comment, we have to keep the conversation going. Continuing a conversation means each person takes turns, with and without words.

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