

Conversations Framework

A Program for Adolescents
and Young Adults



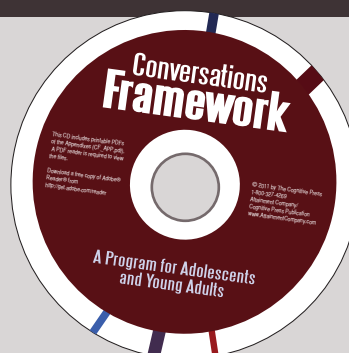
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Conversations Framework CD

Included with this book is a CD containing printable PDFs of the Appendixes (CF_APP.pdf).

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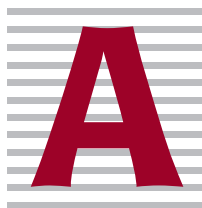
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Contents

Preface	vii
Overview	1
For Whom Is This Resource Written?	2
What Is Included?.....	2
The Framework for Teaching Conversations	3
Background	5
Research Base for Conversations Framework.....	6
The Challenge of Adolescents	8
Principles of Teaching Conversation.....	8
How to Use This Resource	11
Group Composition.....	12
Determining Current Levels of Performance	12
Setting Goals	13
Planning Sessions	14
Conversational Moves Sessions	15
Using the Session Planning Form.....	18
Using a Point System	19
Arranging the Room.....	19
Monitoring Progress.....	19
Conversational Moves	
Starting a Conversation	21
Maintaining a Topic	33
Extending a Topic.....	45
Changing a Topic	55
Requesting Clarification.....	65
Responding to Requests for Clarification.....	77
Foundation Skill Activities	

Conceptual Network	87
Vocabulary	101
Sentence Structure	115
Attention and Memory	129
Organization of Language	143
Mutual Focus	159
Perspective Taking	173
Turn Taking	185
Nonverbal Communication.....	199
Language Functions	213
Cooperative Principles.....	229
Given and New Information	239
Speech Acts	251
Style Changing	263
Appendixes	
Appendix A: Conversational Moves Rubric	276
Appendix B: Foundation Skills Checklist.....	277
Appendix C: Classroom Communication Scale.....	279
Appendix D: Session Planning Form	280
Appendix E: Progress Monitoring Rubrics	281
Appendix F: Point Sheet.....	287
References	288

Preface

Conversations Framework is a result of more than two decades of work. The original program was developed in the early 1980s when speech-language pathologists began to integrate the concept of pragmatics, or social use of language, into their assessment and intervention practices. We began to recognize that teaching people to become effective communicators required more than developing vocabulary and sentence structure, but rather, we had to place our work into an entirely new framework that would bring together a range of linguistic-conceptual and social-cognitive abilities into the context of conversational interaction.

During the initial development of the **Conversations** program (Hoskins, 1987), we recognized that the end goal of communication intervention was to have individuals be able to participate effectively in conversational interaction. Because we were focusing on social communication, group intervention was actually seen as more effective than intervention sessions that were one-on-one. We brought together the research on communication development, motivation, and pragmatics to develop a framework that could guide our intervention and one that would address all of the skills needed to communicate effectively.

At a conference at the Erikson Institute in Chicago in 1983, Jerome Bruner reviewed the initial draft of the Conversations program and encouraged us to “keep looking at the interaction.” It was his seminal work on language development that provided much of the grounding for our work. His article, “The Ontogenesis of Speech Acts” (Bruner, 1975), clearly articulated what we found to be true: language is learned in interaction, based on mutual focus and joint activity.

The original Conversations program was developed in collaboration with Sylvia Mendoza and Carole Woolf, as part of Carole Woolf’s doctoral research. We worked with groups of adolescents with language, learning, and social-emotional disorders at Almansor Educational Center. That work was presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Convention in 1983, followed by papers at the California Speech-Language-Hearing Association in 1984 and 1985, and the annual convention of the Council for Exceptional Children in 1985. Effectiveness data was collected in the Los Angeles County schools in 1987, and it was presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association national convention in 1988.

In 1996, the second version of Conversations (Hoskins) was published by Thinking Publications, with Nancy McKinley as Editor in Chief, and Linda Schreiber as Senior Editor. By then, there was a growing recognition that language was learned and used in conversation, and that professionals should work collaboratively to maximize language learning. Conversations became a valuable tool for professionals who wanted to engage learners in conversation and teach key communication skills in a structured format. The program was redesigned to become more portable and to include curriculum links with ties to support the conversations of the classroom.

Professionals continue to be aware of the importance of successful social communication, the complexity of the foundation skills involved, and the need for a structured framework for assessment and intervention (Timler, 2008). This is recognized as a critical area of need for, not only children and adolescents with

specific language impairments, but also for those with language-based learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, attention deficits, social-emotional disorders, and autism-spectrum disorders (ASD). There has been a call for tools that are functional and interactive, and bring together the range of skills needed for effective social communication or conversational interaction. Although there are materials available to teach specific language and social communication skills, none provide an organized framework that brings all of the pieces together for professionals to facilitate conversation in groups and monitor progress.

This program is a product of many conversations. It is only through impassioned mutual focus and consistent joint activity that projects like this are brought to fruition. This interaction included careful observation of hundreds of conversation groups, becoming conversant with the research of other professionals, listening to the thoughtful suggestions of colleagues, and maintaining a strong commitment to the professionals who will engage with us through Conversations Framework. We would like to thank some of the participants in our conversations who have contributed to this work.

We acknowledge Carole Woolf and Sylvia Mendoza, who contributed so much to the development of the initial Conversations program. We also thank the speech-language pathologists who helped develop the activities and pilot the initial program. These include: Maureen Bennett, Julia Sasaki, Roxanne Meyer, Rebecca Zimmer, Reggie Smith, Cheryl Sutton, and Kate Rill. Their observations and their enthusiasm regarding the changes they saw in their own clinical practices, as well as the changes they saw in their clients, had a great deal to do with making the initial version of Conversation becoming a reality for others.

We thank speech-language pathologists across the United States and Canada for their feedback, encouragement, and support over the years that the Conversations program was in use. Stories of how much it changed how professionals worked together, and how adolescents engaged in conversations, have inspired us to continue this work. The encouragement of Donna Seedorf-Harmuth, and Lois and Bob Douglass stand out as particularly important participants in these conversations.

We thank Eric Noel, Kristine's adolescent son, for his suggestions and technical assistance during the most recent revision. His thoughtful recommendations and support made it possible for our work to be even more relevant to adolescents.

Most importantly, we express our appreciation for the commitment and support of our editor, Linda Schreiber. Her encouragement, her expertise, and her mutual focus made this vision become a reality. We look forward to continuing the conversation.

Overview

Overview

Conversations Framework: A Program for Adolescents and Young Adults brings together all of the key skills needed for effective conversational interaction. It provides professionals with a way of organizing the pieces of the puzzle for communication intervention in a social-interactive context. The pieces include the specific linguistic-conceptual skills that have always been part of language intervention, as well as the social-cognitive, or pragmatic, skills that are critical to social communication.

This program provides materials to facilitate conversation groups, teach specific foundation skills, and monitor progress. Although it is designed to be comprehensive, it can be easily used in coordination with other activities and assessment tools.

For Whom Is This Resource Written?

Conversations Framework was originally developed for speech-language pathologists who work with small groups of students or who collaborate with teachers in classroom settings. However, Conversations Framework is also useful for general education teachers, special educators, educational therapists, counselors, social workers, rehabilitation therapists, English as a Second Language (ELL) teachers, and psychologists whose goal is to develop effective social communication skills in preadolescents, adolescents, and young adults—in fact, Conversations Framework is an excellent tool when used collaboratively by these professionals. For those working in schools, these materials can be used in a response-to-intervention (RtI) program to develop the social communication skills necessary for effective interaction in the classroom.

Conversations Framework is designed for use with individuals ranging in age from 11 years to young adulthood. These individuals may have a language disorder, a learning disability, a social-cognitive deficit, a disorder on the autism spectrum (ASD) including Asperger syndrome, a developmental delay, or be learning English as a second language (ESL). Often these individuals have learned a range of specific communication skills, but continue to have difficulty engaging in effective conversational interactions. They are seen to need intervention that focuses on functional social communication skills and prepares them to interact effectively with their families, peers, teachers, employers, and in the community.

The Conversations Framework program is best implemented with groups of four to six, which is a natural grouping for effective conversational interaction. It is also possible to work with larger conversation groups in a classroom, or smaller conversation groups, such as a group as small as two.

What Is Included?

This easy-to-use resource includes:

- √ Session plans for teaching six conversational moves
- √ Materials for assessing use of conversational moves (Appendix A—Conversational Moves Rubric) and foundation skills (Appendix B—Foundation Skills Checklist)

- √ A Classroom Communication Scale (Appendix C) to use in determining classroom performance
- √ 150 activities for building foundation skills needed for conversation
- √ A Session Planning Form (Appendix D) to organize sessions
- √ Rubrics for monitoring progress (Appendix E) for each of the conversational moves
- √ Suggestions for aligning new skills learned to classroom curriculum
- √ A CD including PDF files of all reproducible pages for convenient printing

The Framework for Teaching Conversations

Conversations Framework provides an organized way to plan social communication intervention. The framework, summarized in Figure 1 on page 4, is comprised of two elements: (1) Conversational Moves, and (2) Foundation Skills.

Conversational Moves

Conversation can be seen as a series of “moves,” which are like steps in the dance of conversation. The steps include the following:

1. starting a conversation
2. maintaining a topic
3. extending a topic
4. changing a topic
5. requesting clarification
6. responding to requests for clarification

Of the six conversational moves, the first two, starting a conversation and maintaining a topic, are the basic moves in conversational interaction. The next move, extending a topic, is a more sophisticated form of the first two moves. The fourth move, changing a topic, involves shifting the flow of conversation. The last two moves, requesting clarification and responding to requests for clarification, involve repairing the conversation to maintain clarity and full participation in the interaction.

Conversations Framework will assist you in planning and facilitating sessions that focus on each of the six moves needed for effective conversational interaction. Key skills are taught for each conversational move. Participants are taught to converse using guided conversations, which provide support for experiencing successful social interactions.

Foundation Skills

To use these six conversational moves effectively, participants have to use a range of linguistic-conceptual and social-cognitive foundation skills effectively. Key linguistic-conceptual skills needed for conversations include: having an organized conceptual network from which to draw topics, having a rich vocabulary,

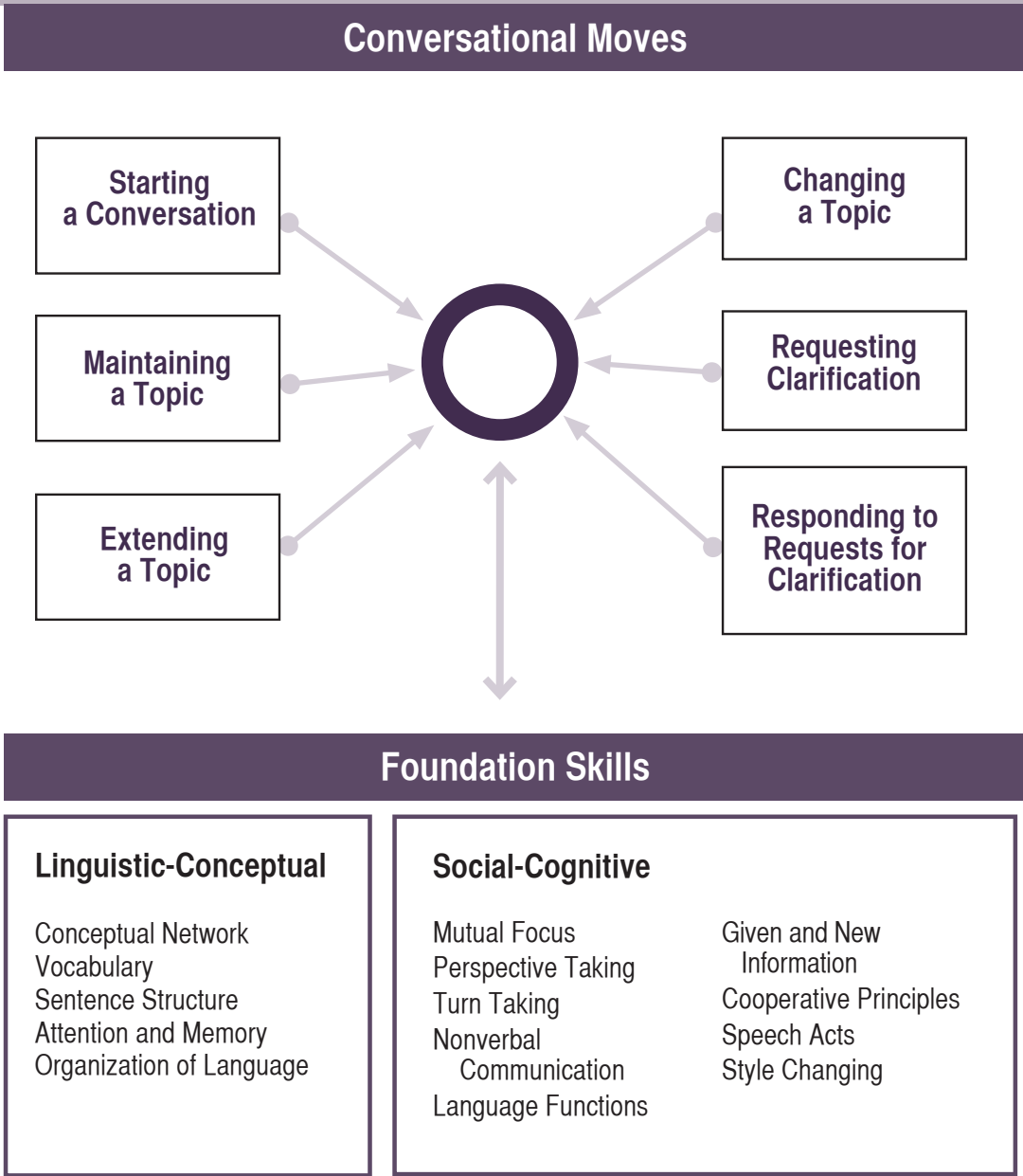


Figure 1: Framework for Teaching Conversations

knowing how to use sentence structure, having adequate attention and memory skills, and being able to organize explanations and stories effectively. Critical social-cognitive skills include: being able to establish mutual focus with a listener, being able to take the perspective of another, knowing how to take turns appropriately, recognizing and using nonverbal communication, using language for a variety of functions, knowing what is given and new information, honoring cooperative principles in conversations, and being able to change styles for different situations. These foundation skills are typically learned in interaction, or in conversation with others. In this program, the skills are taught in interactive activities and then practiced in conversation.

Background

Background

Research Base for Conversations Framework

Communication development does not begin with a child's first spoken word or end with development of adequate sentence structure. Rather, the process of learning to use language effectively begins in infancy and extends into adolescence and adulthood. Seeing language in a social context illustrates its complexity and power.

To participate in a conversation, a wide range of verbal and nonverbal abilities are needed. A person must engage in joint attention, take the perspective of another and, thereby, choose an appropriate topic. One must have an organized set of concepts from which to draw topics and the vocabulary to express those concepts. Moreover, one must be able to retrieve those words and formulate sentences and connected language to initiate and ultimately maintain conversation. This conversational "dance" requires a complex set of linguistic-conceptual skills (e.g., phonology, morphology and syntax, semantics), as well as an awareness of the social-cognitive or pragmatic rules that govern the interaction. Conversation is the social context in which all of these skills are both learned and used.

The importance of developing effective conversational skills is well-documented in the literature (e.g., Brinton, Robinson, & Fujiki, 2004; Gallagher, 1999). Appropriate conversation skills are critical not only in social communication, but also in self-advocacy, literacy, academic achievement, and job success. When people have difficulty with conversation skills they experience challenges establishing and maintaining friendships, participating in the classroom, and interacting in the workplace.

Effectiveness for Learners with a Range of Disabilities

Students with disabilities may not learn appropriate social communication skills implicitly; they often need explicit instruction. Social skill instruction has been found to be effective for students with learning disabilities (Kavale & Mostert, 2004), emotional or behavioral disorders (Gresham, Cook, Crews, & Kern, 2004), and autism spectrum disorders including Asperger syndrome (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007). Intervention has been effective in decreasing inappropriate behaviors, increasing use of prosocial behaviors, and influencing acceptance by peers. Students with autism spectrum disorders in middle and high school have demonstrated not only positive responses to intervention, but also maintenance and generalization of their new skills (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007).

Interventions shown to have the most positive impact on student learning include the use of advance organizers, frequent review, repeated and explicit practice, feedback (Swanson & Hoskyn, 2001), modeling (Bellini, Akullian, & Hopf, 2007), and a combination of direct instruction and strategy instruction (Swanson, 2001). Research on individuals with autism spectrum disorders highlights the benefits of learning social use of language in naturalistic settings, such as the classroom. Research focusing on

developing transition to post-secondary education and employment further emphasizes the need for social skill instruction in authentic, cooperative settings (Bremer & Smith, 2004).

Principles of Language Learning

For teaching to be effective, learners must be actively involved in the learning process (Deshler, 2005; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Wells, 1981). Barnes (1989) pointed out key aspects of effective instruction:

- Learning must be purposeful.
- Learning must be relevant to the learner's world.
- Learning must be situation driven (i.e., it should be driven by the learner's interests and needs).

Engagement and learning are more likely to occur when the content is relevant to the learner; the learner must see relationships between what they are learning and their own real-life experiences, in and out of school (Lumsden, 1994). Opportunities to practice new skills, interact with others, and express voice and choice in one's learning are critical elements that engage learners (Anderman & Midgely, 1998; Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995, as cited in Brewster & Fager, 2000). Larson and McKinley (1995) emphasize this when they state that intervention must be student-centered: "Objectives and activities need to be authentic, meaningful, and relevant from the student's perspective, not just the professional's viewpoint" (p. 173). They go on to explain that for a professional to assist in developing these skills, they should play the role of a mediator or facilitator.

To engage learners, the teacher or professional takes on the role of a facilitator of learning (Damico, 1991; Hoskins, 1987; Mason, 2000). The facilitator not only provides a rich interactive environment for a learner, the facilitator also structures activities so that learners initiate and participate actively in the process. The facilitator guides the process so that the learner can identify key patterns and learn critical skills that are needed for effective interaction.

Learning Language in Interactive Groups

Mashburn, Justice, Downer, and Pianta (2009) showed that interaction with peers who have stronger language abilities was an effective intervention for preschool children with poorer language abilities. Peer interaction has also been shown to be a crucial intervention tool with other populations. For students with learning disabilities, small interactive group instruction has been identified as an instructional strategy that has some of the strongest influence on student learning, despite the content of instruction (Swanson & Hoskyn, 2001; Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). Peer interaction has also been found to be important in developing social interaction skills in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders (Prelock, 2006). With this in mind, group settings have been found to be more conducive to language learning than individual sessions. Effective intervention requires explicit instruction on a range of skills in the context of peer interaction (e.g., Bellini, Akullian, & Hopf, 2007; Bremer & Smith, 2004; Swanson, 2001).

The Challenge of Adolescents

Communicating effectively in social situations requires that participants master many skills and abilities that may have not have previously been included in traditional language intervention. Even after many years of language intervention, adolescents may have difficulty communicating with their families, their friends, teachers, and others in their communities. They have not been taught some of the very skills needed to engage in conversation with others.

Adolescents present a particularly interesting challenge in the areas of curriculum and behavior management. Adolescents are often painfully aware of their deficits but are unwilling to participate in programs that are based on drills, or to participate in activities that are not based on their interests or needs or do not appear relevant to them.

Larson and McKinley (1995, 2003) have called for intervention for adolescents that focuses on the development of functional communication and is conducted within group settings. They also recommend the elimination of hidden agendas (i.e., adolescents should be informed directly about both assessment and intervention). Adolescents should know what they are working on and why so that they can participate actively and use what they learn. In addition to their need to be informed and to participate fully in the learning process, adolescents need ample opportunity for peer interaction.

Interacting effectively in conversation is a critical skill for adolescents who have communication difficulties. It is important that adolescents see intervention as something that meets their needs. This will happen if they see that they are learning to communicate about content that is important to them. The content of the sessions should be generated by the participants; the professional then facilitates the process of communication and assists their learning to communicate in ways that helps them achieve their goals.

From this perspective, language intervention involves more than teaching rules of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. It is also more than teaching the rules of pragmatics, or use of language in social contexts. All of these aspects of language must be brought together to use language effectively in conversation. Conversations Framework was developed with this goal in mind. It is a framework in which preadolescents, adolescents, and young adults can experience success when communicating with others in their worlds.

Principles for Teaching Conversation

Three principles were drawn from this research and they are displayed in Figure 2. These principles serve as guidelines for making decisions when working with groups of adolescents.

Principles of Intervention

1. Language Is Learned in Interaction
2. Conversation Groups Are Facilitated
3. Sessions Are Organized to Maximize Learning

Figure 2: Principles of Intervention

Language Is Learned in Interaction

It is in interaction with others that language is learned, and it is in interaction that the natural motivation to use language exists. Active participation is not forthcoming from participants when “intervention is done to them.” Too often, participants are the last to know the purpose of a session or how they might use a new skill in their everyday lives. They are often told to listen and only respond when called on. This does not allow them to learn normal patterns of social interaction. Instead, it restricts their communication experience to “teacher talk,” where questions are asked and responses are given, but natural conversation does not usually occur. The sessions in this program include components designed to achieve successful interaction, to encourage active participation, and to explore with participants how a new skill might be of use in their conversations.

Conversation Groups Are Facilitated

In this framework, conversations are facilitated and the participants are the focus of the sessions. They learn to communicate with one another, rather than with the professional or facilitator. They are given responsibility for the communication and they learn to effectively manage their own communicative interactions. In this program, the professional’s role shifts from being the central focus of the session to being a facilitator who moderates, models behaviors, and coaches.

As a Moderator—The facilitator moderates the sessions by introducing the participants, explaining what they will be working on, and discussing how a behavior or skill may be useful in daily life. This allows the participants to be aware of what they are learning and increases the probability that they will use the skills in their daily communications outside of the session.

Another form of moderating is to recap—a “time-out” gesture that stops the group discussion to emphasize something that has just occurred. These pauses should occur in such a manner that they do not disrupt the flow of communication, but frequently enough that useful feedback is provided as needed. This process allows participants to observe what makes their communication effective or ineffective.

As moderator, the facilitator structures the interaction; or redirects the conversation to a particular topic or by suggesting one participant address a comment to another participant in the group. Initially, participants may direct most of their communication to you out of habit. Therefore, they may have to be redirected frequently to communicate with the others in the conversation group.

As a Model—The facilitator models a skill demonstrating a form of communication, a particular communication behavior, or a how a particular activity should be carried out. One form of modeling is to rephrase something that a participant says to clarify the meaning and facilitate the conversation (e.g., in response to an almost unintelligible comment, the facilitator might say,

“Carol, do you mean ‘I have one like that?’ ”). Then, may go on to encourage the participants to use the rephrased form rather than to respond, “Yeah, that’s what I meant.” In this way, the participant is not repeating words, phrases, or sentences stripped of their context. Instead, he or she uses the model immediately in interaction.

Modeling is best used by demonstrating something or giving an example during the discussion. When setting up an activity, the participants benefit from having a model of what they are to do before they are expected to take a turn. Modeling should be used sparingly in guided conversations. Whenever possible, make suggestions in the form of coaching to maintain interaction among participants.

As a Coach—The facilitator also coaches participants by helping them experience effective communication. To coach, prompts, cues, or choices are provided for the participants as they communicate with one another (e.g., you might stand behind one of the participants in a role-play situation and quietly make suggestions). This allows the participants to interact effectively with their partners and to experience the satisfaction of getting direct feedback from a partner.

Sessions Are Organized to Maximize Learning

For some individuals, the regularities of communication are not learned implicitly through everyday exposure, rather, these skills must be explicitly highlighted, making the relevant aspects of communication observable and therefore learnable. Conversations Framework highlights one aspect of communication at a time without isolating that aspect from the context of conversation, which would cause individuals to learn splinter skills they cannot integrate or use in conversation.

The framework focuses sequentially on each of the six conversational moves. Although all six conversational moves are used concurrently in a conversation, each session is designed to focus on one particular move. Then the conversational move is practiced in a guided conversation. As each of the conversational moves is taught, it may be observed that some or all of the participants need work on key foundation skills necessary to effectively use a move. Activities can then be planned to focus on them. These activities are followed by another guided conversation if time allows.

How to Use This Resource

How to Use This Resource

Group Composition

Conversations Framework is designed for use with groups of preadolescents, adolescents, or young adults. The most manageable number of participants in a group is 4 to 6; however, as few as 2 participants or as many as 12 can participate. When working in a classroom, several conversation groups can be working simultaneously. If you are in an inclusive setting and/or collaborating with other professionals, you can co-facilitate larger groups. One of you can monitor progress, while the other coaches participants and provides feedback to encourage effective participation.

Conversation groups can include participants with diverse needs (e.g., those with speech and language disorders, those who are learning English as a second language [ESL], and those with typical communication abilities). It is not necessary for participants to have typical articulation and sentence structure to participate in a conversation group. Participants' speech should be intelligible enough to make their needs known, or they should have adequate augmentative communication devices. The conversation group can provide a context for developing a range of needed communication skills.

Determining Current Levels of Performance

Before beginning conversation groups, determine each individual's current level of performance using multiple measures in different settings. This may include formal diagnostic testing and observations of the use of the six conversational moves; both may also reveal weaknesses in specific foundation skills.

Assessing Conversational Moves

The Conversational Moves Rubric found in Appendix A can be used to determine an individual's independent and appropriate use of the six conversational moves in conversations. This rubric can be used when observing an individual's conversational performance in the classroom, clinic, or in social settings.

To obtain an initial baseline, schedule one or more times to observe the individual in conversations. You may want to observe the individual in classroom discussions in various classes and/or in social conversations with peers (e.g., in the cafeteria, during school activities, in job settings, and/or in a group setting in your sessions). To get a baseline score, rate the individual's performance as 1 (below expectancy), 2 (emerging), or 3 (at mastery) for each of the six conversational moves. Total the points and rate the individual's overall performance.

An individual's use of conversational moves may be reported quantitatively and/or descriptively. Consider the following example:

Jordon's success in using conversational moves appropriately was observed while he engaged in conversations with peers during classroom discussions. On the Conversational Moves Rubric,

Jordon earned a score of 11/18 reflecting that his use of conversational skills is below expectancy. He demonstrated mastery of starting a conversation. He maintained topics, extended topics, and changed topics, but only when prompted. He did not request clarification or respond to requests for clarification appropriately during those opportunities.

Assessing Foundation Skills

Foundation skills needed for successful conversations can be observed using the Foundation Skills Checklist provided in Appendix B. This checklist specifies the skills individuals draw from in order to communicate effectively in conversation. If an individual is having difficulty communicating in conversation, review the Foundation Skills Checklist and other assessment data to help you understand how the individual's strengths and needs in the skills listed may be impacting performance.

Assessing Classroom Communication

A Classroom Communication Scale (Appendix C) is provided for completion by classroom teachers. The scale can be used to get feedback from classroom teachers or other professionals who have contact with the individual. It can help pinpoint communication difficulties and foundation skills that may be lacking.

Setting Goals

Information gathered from the Conversational Moves Rubric, the Foundation Skills Checklist, the Classroom Communication Scale, and other assessment data can be used to set an individual's goals and learning objectives.

If an individual demonstrates general difficulty in conversational interaction, an appropriate goal may be:

To demonstrate appropriate conversational interaction, including starting a conversation, maintaining a topic, extending a topic, changing a topic, requesting clarification, and responding to requests for clarification.

If an individual demonstrates difficulty using a specific conversational move, such as maintaining a topic, an appropriate goal might be:

To use key behaviors needed to maintain a topic appropriately in a conversation.

For individuals who are students, goals can be aligned to standards and benchmarks of your state. The following is a standard recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (2010):

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

The following is an example of a similar language arts standard for the state of New Mexico (New Mexico Content Standards for Language Arts, 2010).

Students will communicate effectively through speaking and writing, specifically using speaking as an interpersonal communication tool.

Information from the Foundation Skills Checklist or other assessments can also be used to set goals for foundation skills. For example, if an individual shows difficulty with turn taking in conversations, an appropriate goal might be:

To contribute to and participate effectively in conversations using appropriate turn taking.

Planning Sessions

Session plans for the six conversational moves and Foundation Skills Activities are included in this resource. How many sessions to spend on each conversational move and which Foundation Skills Activities to use depend on the needs of the participants. Usually several sessions are required to focus on each move and Foundation Skills Activities are embedded as needed. Figure 3 illustrates the design and flow of the sessions.

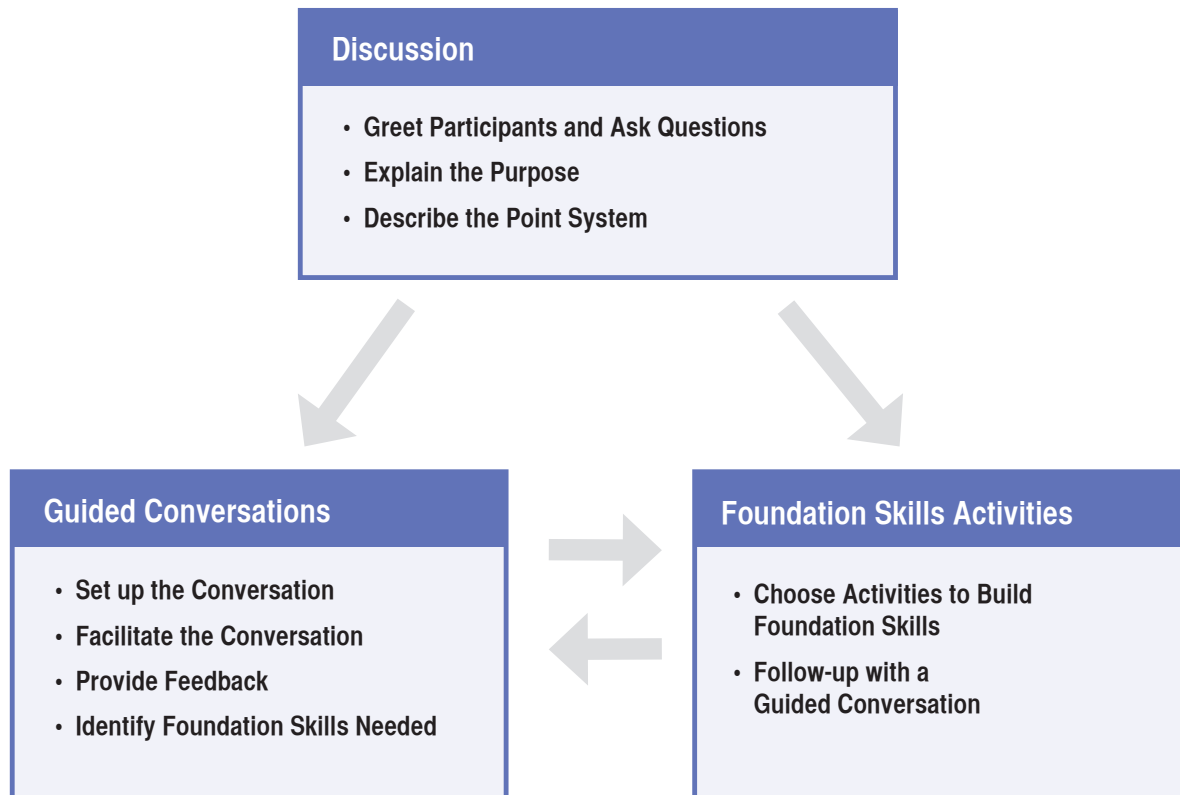


Figure 3: Session Design

Foundation Skills Activities: **Attention & Memory**

Repeating to Remember.....	131
Using Chunking to Remember.....	132
Using Categorization to Remember	133
Word-Retrieval Cues	134
Using Associations to Remember	135
Using the Alphabet as a Cue	136
Visualizing As a Memory Strategy.....	137
Choosing a Strategy	138
Listening for Information	139
Comprehension Questions As Guides	140
Summarizing to Remember.....	141
Recalling Facts in Stories	142

Background

When people have weaknesses in attention, memory, and retrieval, they may be seen to have difficulty knowing how to enter a conversation, may lose track of what is being said, and may have difficulty finding the words they want to use to express themselves. Any or all of these issues may make them seem awkward, disinterested, or frustrated.

Due to limited auditory attention or short-term memory skills, they may appear to be inattentive when others are talking and, thus, may not maintain topics well. In class, they may miss key parts of discussions or directions. They are often uncomfortable asking for clarification.

Deficits with working memory or executive function may result in difficulty planning and knowing how to begin a conversation. Individuals may avoid social situations because they feel hesitant and confused. They may not be able to keep up with the flow of the interaction.

Along with difficulties with attending to, and remembering information some individuals may experience challenges retrieving or recalling words from long-term memory. They may know a person's name or a fact, but not be able to produce it in the moment. Students with word-finding problems may raise their hands in class, but when called on, may not be able to retrieve the answer. They may have difficulty performing mathematical calculations in which facts or formulas are needed. These individuals complain that they have studied and think they know information, but they "blank out" in test situations.

When participants in conversation groups lose focus, have difficulty knowing how to begin, or have difficulty retrieving words, the facilitator can quietly cue him or her. Providing choices or suggestions can support participants in experiencing and maintaining successful conversational interactions (Geffner, 2005).

Activities are included to strengthen these foundation skills. These include activities are designed to teach participants to make associations, visualize, and chunk information in order to recall it. Working memory has been found to be strengthened by strategic activities that require visualization (Montgomery, Magimairaj, & Finney, 2010). Auditory attention can also be developed by using listening skills activities (Ferre, 2007). It may also be important to refer participants for further assessment and medical treatment of memory or attentional issues.

Repeating to Remember

Objective: Recall a set of oral directions using repetition

Difficulty Level: Low

Materials: Unlined paper and pencil for each participant, set of directions with one to five steps

Curriculum Link: Present a set of directions that might be given in a science class or an art class.

1 Greet Participants and Engage Them

Have you ever listened to someone's directions but forgotten what he or she said before you could carry them out? What do you do when that happens? What could you do to help remember? Today we are going to work on one strategy for remembering.

2 Explain Purpose

To learn a strategy to remember directions

3 Facilitate the Activity

- Explain that a way to remember directions is to repeat them. Tell the group they are going to practice repeating directions as a way to remember them.
- Present directions of one to five elements (such as the following) to the participants. Tell them to wait until all parts of the directions have been stated before beginning to repeat and draw. Have them repeat the first direction aloud, but to repeat the others to themselves.

Draw a line down the middle of the page (pause to have participants repeat aloud and draw).

Draw a circle on the left side of the page. Draw a square next to the circle (pause and have participants repeat to themselves).

Write an M in the circle. Write an E in the square. Draw a line from the circle to the square.

Draw a diamond on the right side of the page. Draw a circle next to the diamond. Make an X in the circle. Draw a square around the circle.

- Observe results at the end of the exercise. Discuss situations in which this strategy could help to recall directions (e.g., getting directions when you are lost, having no paper to write on).

► Note

Participants may have difficulty following directional terms such as left and right. If this occurs, review the terms before beginning the lesson.

▼ To Decrease Level of Difficulty

Decrease the length and complexity of the directions.

▲ To Increase Level of Difficulty

Increase the length and complexity of the directions.

Using Chunking to Remember

Objective: Remember and recall using a chunking strategy

Difficulty Level: Low

Materials: Whiteboard, marker, eraser, school/clinic telephone number, one or more unfamiliar telephone numbers

Curriculum Link: Find out what other numbers or formulas participants may want to remember for a class and use this strategy to remember them.

1 Greet Participants and Engage Them

Do you ever have trouble remembering a series of numbers? How many of you remember phone numbers well? Today we are going to work on getting better at that.

2 Explain Purpose

To learn a strategy to remember phone numbers

3 Facilitate the Activity

- Engage the group in a discussion of why a series of seven numbers is usually hard to remember. Present an unfamiliar phone number at an even rate of one digit per second.
- See how many of the group can repeat the digits in sequence. Explain that when items are grouped, or chunked, they are easier to remember.
- Present the school/clinic phone number in two chunks—the first three numbers and then the last four numbers. See how many of the participants can repeat these chunks.
- Have the participants discuss using this strategy to remember other necessary information (e.g., other phone numbers, addresses, license plate numbers).

► Note

Participants may have problems with number reversals and short-term memory.

▼ To Decrease Level of Difficulty

Use chunks of three digits, two digits, and two digits.

▲ To Increase Level of Difficulty

Have participants chunk lists of information into groups and practice remembering them.

Foundation Skills Activities: Nonverbal Communication

The Power of Eye Gaze	201
Interpreting Body Language in Photos	202
Expressing Interest Using Body Language	203
Interpreting Body Language to Determine Interest.....	204
Communicating with Body Language Only.....	205
Interpreting Emotion through Prosody	206
Expressing Emotions Using Prosody.....	207
Reading Body Language	208
Identifying Problems in Nonverbal Communication	209
Communicating Emotion with Body Language	211
Communicating without Words.....	212

Background

Much of what is communicated in conversation is nonverbal. Often, nonverbal messages are stronger than verbal ones. For example, when one person tells another that he or she is not angry but his or her body language indicates otherwise, the nonverbal message overrides the verbal one.

Adolescents with communication difficulties often give others strong nonverbal messages that undermine their efforts to communicate. Even if they do formulate well-structured sentences, their peers may not want to communicate with them because they “seem strange.” They may avert their eye gaze, posture themselves defensively, or stand too near or too far away. Often, they are unaware of the negative nonverbal messages they are giving others.

Similarly, individuals with communication difficulties may have difficulty reading the nonverbal signals of others. Depending upon the extent of their difficulties, some may misinterpret gestures or facial expressions, whereas others may appear to be insensitive to more subtle nonverbal cues. In either case, the inappropriate interpretation and use of nonverbal communication can be a strong disruptive influence during conversation. This is especially true for adolescents with autism spectrum disorders, including Asperger syndrome, who have difficulty recognizing and responding to the nonverbal cues of their communication partners.

To build nonverbal communication skills, participants may engage in role-play situations, watch videos, and observe each other communicating (Garcia Winner, 2005; Miller, 2004). Activities in this section address learning to read nonverbal communication and use nonverbal communication effectively.

The Power of Eye Gaze

Objective: Use appropriate eye gaze during conversation

Difficulty Level: Low

Materials: Whiteboard, marker, eraser

Curriculum Link: Use this activity to build the skills needed for working in a group or in pairs.

1 Greet Participants and Engage Them

Have you ever tried to talk with someone who wouldn't look at you? How did you feel?

2 Explain Purpose

To use appropriate eye contact

3 Facilitate the Activity

- Discuss how people are expected to look at each other when having a conversation.
- Ask participants to select partners and choose A and B roles. Have the partners sit near each other (i.e., within an arm's length of each other).
- Allow two minutes for the As to tell the Bs about their favorite movie.
- After the communication, have the Bs rate the A's eye contact on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 as poor, 5 as average, and 10 as great. Write the rating scale where everyone can see it.
- Have the partners switch roles and repeat the exercise.

► Note

Cultural differences in use of eye gaze should be considered.

▼ To Decrease Level of Difficulty

Break the participants into trios. Have the third person observe and rate the other participants' eye contact.

▲ To Increase Level of Difficulty

Give the As a free choice of topics. Extend the time to three minutes.

Interpreting Body Language in Photos

Objective: Interpret nonverbal signals that express feelings

Difficulty Level: Low

Materials: Magazines containing pictures of people, a pair of scissors for each participant

Curriculum Links: Use this activity as a prewriting exercise for English assignments.

1 Greet Participants and Engage Them

How do people usually show their feelings? Are you good at reading other persons' feelings?

2 Explain Purpose

To learn how people show their feelings

3 Facilitate the Activity

- Give each participant a magazine and a pair of scissors. Instruct the group to find and cut out pictures of people showing different feelings. Allow five minutes for this part of the activity.
- Ask each participant to choose one picture and describe the feeling illustrated in the picture. Assist each participant in specifically identifying the nonverbal communication or other cues that were used to determine the feeling expressed.
- Have each participant recall a time when he or she felt the same way or experienced the same feeling. Ask the other participants to add to the discussion.
- Discuss the advantages of being able to “read feelings” during conversations with others.

► Note

It may be helpful to identify specific nonverbal signals, or cues, used to express a particular feeling. If necessary, use role-playing to demonstrate these signals/cues.

▼ To Decrease Level of Difficulty

Select two emotions (e.g., happy and sad) and have participants find pictures that show the emotions. Provide participants with a list of emotion words to choose from.

▲ To Increase Level of Difficulty

Have participants brainstorm words that might be used to describe specific emotions.

Appendixes

Conversational Moves Rubric

Name _____

Date _____

Observer _____

Location _____

Directions: Observe the individual during a conversation group or in the classroom. Rate the individual's current performance for each move as 1 (below expectancy), 2 (emerging), or 3 (at mastery). Total the points and refer to the rating scale below.

	1 = Below Expectancy	2 = Emerging	3 = At Mastery	Score
Starting a Conversation	Does not initiate conversations or does so inappropriately	Initiates conversations with prompting or initiates them infrequently	Independently and appropriately initiates conversations	
Maintaining a Topic	Does not maintain a topic by contributing to the conversation or does so inappropriately	Maintains a topic in a conversation with prompting or inconsistently	Independently and appropriately maintains a topic in a conversation	
Extending a Topic	Does not extend a topic in a conversation by adding comments or does so inappropriately	Extends a topic in a conversation with prompting or does so inconsistently	Independently and appropriately extends a topic in a conversation	
Changing a Topic	Does not indicate a change of topic in a conversation or does so inappropriately	Indicates a change of topic in a conversation with prompting or does so inconsistently	Independently and appropriately changes a topic in a conversation	
Requesting Clarification	Does not request clarification in a conversation or does so inappropriately	Requests clarification in a conversation with prompting or does so inconsistently	Independently requests clarification in a conversation when appropriate	
Responding to Requests for Clarification	Does not respond to requests for clarification in a conversation or does so inappropriately	Responds to requests for clarification in a conversation with prompting or does so inconsistently	Independently and appropriately responds to requests for clarification in a conversation	
TOTAL				/18

RATING SCALE:

6–11 Below Expectancy **12–17** Emerging **18** At Mastery

Comments/Goals:

Foundation Skills Checklist

Name: _____

Date: _____ Examiner: _____

Sources of Data (e.g., tests, observations, classroom reports):

Directions: Check the foundation skills that require further work. Then select activities to build the foundation skills.

Linguistic-Conceptual

- Conceptual Network** Does the individual have an adequate store of concepts from which he or she can draw topics for conversation? Does the individual make associations among concepts that allow for logical shifts from one topic to another?
- Vocabulary** Does the individual understand the vocabulary used by others? Does the individual have adequate vocabulary for expressing his or her ideas? Does the individual understand abstract or figurative language? Does the individual understand words with multiple meanings?
- Sentence Structure** Does the individual comprehend and use adequate sentence structure to effectively make the targeted conversational move?
- Attention and Memory** Does the individual have difficulty attending to key information and retaining information in an orderly sequence? Does the individual use strategies to facilitate memory? Does the individual have difficulty retrieving specific words in conversation?
- Organization of Language** Does the individual tell stories, give procedures, and give directions in an organized, well-sequenced manner? Does the individual produce well-formulated descriptions and explanations? Does the individual use language to plan and organize his or her own thinking?

Social-Cognitive

- Mutual Focus** Does the individual focus on an object, event, or topic in coordination with others? Does the individual recognize things that are of mutual interest or concern?
- Perspective Taking** Does the individual recognize another's point of view and take it into account when communicating with that person?
- Turn Taking** Does the individual know when and how to take a turn in a conversation? Does the individual recognize others' nonverbal cues?
- Nonverbal Communication** Does the individual use appropriate facial expressions, gestures, and posture? Does the individual have difficulty with eye gaze? Does the individual position himself or herself appropriately in relation to others? Does the individual use unusual vocal patterns?
- Language Functions** Does the individual use language effectively and flexibly to obtain information, give information, have people do something, get what he or she wants, or set up personal interactions?
- Given and New Information** Does the individual recognize information that may already be known or obvious in a given situation? Does the individual give others sufficient background information so that he or she is understood?
- Cooperative Principles** Does the individual interact cooperatively with others? Does the individual provide enough information for others? Does the individual dominate a conversation? Does the individual make relevant contributions to a conversation? Does the individual recognize when someone is telling the truth or joking? Does the individual present information and ideas in an organized manner?
- Speech Acts** Does the individual use language that results in action? For example, does the individual make requests, promises, declarations, and assertions effectively?
- Style Changing** Does the individual know how to shift communication styles depending on the situation?

Summary:

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Classroom Communication Scale

Student's Name _____ Date _____

School/Grade _____ Teacher _____

Return to _____ By _____

Student's Overall Classroom Communication:

Directions: Please rate this student's skill in the areas listed. Circle the number representing the student's performance as follows:

	weak skills	excellent skills								
Student attends to classroom presentations and discussions.										
Student understands the vocabulary used in class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Students remembers verbal directions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student attends to what is important and knows where to begin.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student retrieves specific names, words, or facts (e.g., multiplication tables).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student formulates a clear explanation, description, or story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student volunteers in class and contributes to classroom discussions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student asks for help when he or she does not understand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student corrects his or her miscommunications.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student makes use of classroom adaptations (e.g., prompts, cues, charts, resources, peer support).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Connect the circles to obtain a profile.

What would you like to see change to increase this student's success?

Total (Sum of numbers circled): _____

Other comments:

Scoring

- 1** = very weak; rarely performs
- 2** = only performs with maximum support
- 3** = performs approximately 30% of the time
- 4** = performs approximately 40% of the time
- 5** = emerging (performs 50% of the time)
- 6** = performs approximately 60% of the time
- 7** = needs some support; performs approximately 70% of the time
- 8** = performs well approximately 80% of the time
- 9** = performs well approximately 90% of the time
- 10** = excellent skills

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