

Initiating, Maintaining, and Ending Conversations LE 25

[Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review the [Introduction to Teaching Healthy Relationships and Relationship Skills](#) for suggestions on teaching social-emotional skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SES. If you have not already taught students how to role-play, observe, coach, and give feedback, see the [Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback Reading & Process](#) ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for detailed information on how to set up and teach role-playing that uses students as coaches and observers (who provide feedback). In addition, see the [Observing Giving Feedback Skill Card](#) ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

The purpose of this learning experience is to increase students' competency in initiating, maintaining, and ending conversations. Point out to students that it is very easy for some people to initiate, maintain, and end conversations, but it may not be easy for others who may be introverted and/or shy. As with all skills, one can become more proficient in initiating, maintaining, and ending conversations.

Procedure/Directions:

Either as a whole class or in groups of 3-4, have students brainstorm ways people their age can do the following:

1. Greet someone they don't know well
2. Initiate a conversation with someone they don't know or know that well.
3. Introduce themselves to people they don't know
4. Keep a conversation going once the conversation has been initiated.
5. Comfortably end a conversation.
6. Organize an activity with another person or group.

If they are working in small groups, have a member from each group report their results. Create a class list.

Brainstorming Questions

1. Brainstorm and create a list of how people their age can greet someone they know.

Possible responses include:

- Saying "Hi"
- Saying "Hi" and using the person's name
- A nod, smile, or wave of the hand.

If there are other suggestions that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list.

2. Brainstorm and create a list of ways people their age can initiate conversations with someone they don't know or know well. You may use the examples of initiating conversations before or after class, in the hall, during lunch, an after-school activity, a party, or some other gathering.

Possible suggestions include:

1. Ask open-ended questions about something you know you have in common with the person (e.g., a book you see them with, an activity or sport you know they are involved with, etc.). Get them talking and be a good listener. People like others who listen well and show an interest in them.
2. Ask an open-ended question about something happening in school, the community, or the world. If you are in a class with them, ask what they think about the teacher, the subject, or a recent project or class activity. Try to avoid "yes" or "no" questions. Continue to ask open-ended questions.
3. Compliment them on something and, if possible, follow up with questions (e.g., what they are wearing, their hair), a skill (e.g., you have a great voice and then how long have you been singing), their personality (e.g., you have a great sense of humor), personal features (you have a great smile), etc.
4. If you are at a total loss, you can use rather worn-out but effective openers, such as talking about the weather, local sports teams, etc.
5. If it seems like they need help with something, volunteer to help. Or, if you need help, ask them if they could help you. People like to help.

If there are other suggestions that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list.

3. Brainstorm and create a list of ways people their age can introduce themselves to people they don't know. You may use the examples of initiating conversations before or after class, in the hall, during lunch, an after-school activity, a party, or some other gathering.

Possible responses include:

1. Hi, my name is...
2. If they don't go to the same school or live in the same town, ask them questions about what their school/town is like. Ask them about school and activities they are involved in, and share your information with them. Ask an open-ended question. Try to avoid "yes" or "no" questions. Continue to ask open-ended questions.

If there are other suggestions that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list.

4. Brainstorm and create a list of ways people their age can keep a conversation going once it has been initiated.

Possible responses include:

1. Ask open-ended questions. Try to avoid “yes” or “no” questions.
2. Get them talking about themselves, especially about things they are interested in.
3. Express an interest in the other person’s expertise, activities, or unique ability.
4. Be enthusiastic and positive.
5. Be a good listener.
6. Tell them things about yourself. Determine what you want them to know about you and share that information.
7. Make silences work for you. People don’t like silence and may fill the void if you run out of things to say.

If there are other suggestions that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list.

5. Brainstorm and list ways people their age can comfortably end a conversation.

Possible suggestions include:

1. The ending should be as smooth and natural as possible.
2. Don’t cut the other person off in the middle of a sentence—try to find a natural place to stop.
3. Nonverbal cues, such as breaking eye contact, moving toward the exit, smiling, etc., can indicate that you want to end the conversation.
4. Be sure to convey the following message: you are about to leave, you’ve enjoyed the conversation (being with the other person), and you hope to see them soon.
5. If you want to meet with the person soon, make a date (time and place) when you will meet (see below).
6. You can always say that you need to get going and enjoyed talking with them.

If there are other suggestions that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list.

6. Brainstorm and list ways people their age can organize an activity with another person or group.

Possible suggestions include:

1. Have something definite in mind (don't ask if they would like to get together). Say: "Would you like to...."
2. Have an alternative in mind to allow the person or group some freedom of choice.
3. Don't sound negative, as if the other person will be doing you a favor or you expect them to say no. Avoid saying something like, "You wouldn't want to go out with me, would you?"
4. Before ending the conversation, try to determine a specific day and time.

If there are other suggestions that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list.

Listening & Maintaining A Conversation

A key component of successfully maintaining a conversation is communicating that you are listening and interested in what they say. Below are some tips for being a good listener. The more advanced skill of listening in a way that communicates that you understand them and are considering what they are saying (active listening) is addressed in depth in the Effective Listening LE.

Review the Basic Listening Tips outlined below.

Basic Listening Tips

Pay attention and show concern.

1. Give the speaker your full attention.
2. Make direct eye contact if you feel comfortable with it.
3. Lean forward toward the speaker.
4. Be supportive; don't interrupt, judge, or criticize the speaker.

Use nonverbal skills and brief verbal responses to acknowledge the speaker.

1. Nod or shake your head as appropriate.
2. Change your facial expression as appropriate (for example, show concern or excitement).
3. Say things like "Yes," "I see," "Uh-huh," "mm mm," or "Go on."

Ask clarifying questions such as

1. "So, what happened that got you so upset?" (or "got you so excited, "made you so sad," etc.)
2. "What do you think is going on?"
3. "What do you think about that?"
4. Ask how the speaker is feeling. ("How do you feel about that?")

Role-Playing

After students understand how to initiate, maintain, and end conversations, have them role-play with their groups of 3 or 4, starting with initiating a conversation with someone they don't know well. Ensure that everyone has had multiple opportunities to role-play all aspects of initiating, maintaining, and ending conversations. If you use student observers/coaches, the coach only intervenes if the role-player gets stuck. Everyone in the group should have the opportunity to role-play and coach. The coach's primary role is to note what worked well, what didn't, and what, if anything, they would have done differently. The student who coaches should, when possible, then role-play the same skill so they can build on what they learned as a result of observing/coaching.

While small groups are role-playing, you can circulate to gather information about students' competency. When walking around, you can intervene to improve effectiveness, correct misunderstandings and misconceptions about the use of the skills, and reinforce the appropriate and competent use of the skills. You will need to decide whether to intervene with a specific group or wait and process with the entire class. The information you gather will help you determine if you need to reteach and role-play how to use the skill or whether a simple reminder will suffice. After each group has completed all the role plays, bring the whole class back to process. Randomly call on groups or ask for volunteers to role-play each initiating, maintaining, organizing an activity, and ending a conversation skill with you. It would be best if you role-played someone their age. Based on your responses, they should keep the conversation going and then comfortably end it.

Processing The Role-Playing

Questions include:

1. What skills did you use effectively, and what skills do you need to get better at or do more consistently?
2. Which skills were easiest and why?
3. What skills were the most difficult and why?
4. What skills do you think will be easiest to use in real life, and why
5. What skills will you have the most difficulty with when you use them in real life and why?

Additional Activities:

As a follow-up learning experience, have them circulate around the classroom and initiate, maintain, and end a conversation with someone they don't know well. Have them role-play several times with different people. Then, bring the class back together and discuss what they did well and what they need to do to improve.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying Relationship Skills In Real Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. The process of using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences For Initiating, Maintaining, Organizing an Activity, and Ending a Conversation

1. Students develop a goal to manage their thinking in healthier ways using the My Goals Log LE and the My Goals Log ([Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#)). Using the My Goals Log allows students to change their behavior and develop goals that do not require much analysis or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The My Goals Log can be used to have students develop goals and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project.
2. Have students develop and implement the Initiating, Maintaining & Ending Conversations Project ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). The purpose of this project is to facilitate behavior change in ways students have identified as important to them in real-life situations. It is a more extensive project than the My Goals LE. It requires students to monitor their progress over time using self-monitoring charts and making self-assessments of their effort, their progress, and/or the extent to which they completed the project. It is found in the [Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#).