

S K I L L

4

JOINING A CONVERSATION

SKILL STEPS: JOINING A CONVERSATION

1. Listen to what people say.
2. Wait for your turn to talk.
3. Say what you think.

MOTIVATION

Skill Presentation: Shelli Joins a Conversation

Materials

Four puppets (Shelli Squirrel, Benny Frog, Carla Bluejay, Hank Hawk); Posters 1, 2, 3

Introduce the four puppets. Tell students that you're going to present a story about these characters called "Shelli Joins a Conversation." Ask the children to listen carefully.

Shelli Squirrel doesn't know how to join a conversation.

Benny Frog: Hi, Shelli. How are you today?

Shelli Squirrel: Oh, hi, Benny. I'm okay, I guess.

Benny Frog: What's the matter?

Shelli Squirrel: Oh, I'm mad at myself!

Benny Frog: About what?

Shelli Squirrel: In school today, my teacher read us this great story about a family of woodchucks!

Benny Frog: We read that story, too. I liked it.

Shelli Squirrel: So did I, but then my teacher asked us questions about the story, and I didn't say a single thing!

Benny Frog: Well, why didn't you?

Shelli Squirrel: I didn't know how to start. I wanted to talk, but I didn't know what to say.

Ask the children:

- Why is Shelli Squirrel unhappy? (She didn't know how to join a conversation at school.)
- Do you ever wish you were better at talking during conversation?

Benny Frog tells Shelli how to join a conversation.

Benny Frog: You know, I used to have that problem. Then my teacher showed me how to join a conversation. He said joining a conversation means listening to what people say, waiting for your turn to talk, and saying what you think. Since I learned to join a conversation, school is a lot more fun. I also learn more.

Ask the children:

- What does Benny say Shelli should do when she wants to talk in class? (Join a conversation.)
- What does "joining a conversation" mean? (Be sure the skill steps are mentioned: listening, waiting for your turn, saying what you think.)
- What does Benny say happened after he learned to join conversations? (School became more fun, he learns more.)

Shelli and her friends practice joining a conversation.

Shelli Squirrel: Can you show me?

Benny Frog: Sure. Here come Carla Bluejay and Hank Hawk. I'll ask them to help. (*Pause.*) Hi, Carla! Hi, Hank! I'm going to show Shelli how to join a conversation. Will you pretend to be her classmates? I'll

pretend to be your teacher, and we'll talk about that story about woodchucks we all read today.

Carla Bluejay: Sure, Benny! I could use some practice joining a conversation, too.

Hank Hawk: Boy, so could I! I'm not too good at that, either.

Benny Frog: Okay, let's get started. Who can tell me how the story started? *(Pause.)* Well, who can tell me how it ended? *(Pause.)* Who remembers the name of the main character? *(Pause.)* Now, class, we can't have a conversation unless you talk. Someone help by answering a question. Who liked the story we read?

Carla Bluejay: I liked it a lot.

Benny Frog: Good, Carla. What was your favorite part?

Carla Bluejay: I liked when the littlest woodchuck ran away from home.

Benny Frog: Okay. Who else had a favorite part?

Carla Bluejay: I also liked when the little woodchuck met the wren building its nest.

Benny Frog: Thanks, Carla. Anyone else? *(Pause.)* We still don't have a conversation here because Shelli and Hank haven't said anything. In a conversation, everyone gets to take a turn and say something.

Ask the children:

- Why does Benny say they still don't have a conversation? (Shelli and Hank haven't contributed.)
- What happens in a conversation? (Everyone gets a turn to talk.)

Carla Bluejay: I liked the part about the wren, too.

Benny Frog: Thanks, Carla. You told us what you thought. Who'd like to talk next?

Shelli Squirrel: I didn't understand why the little woodchuck was afraid of the bear.

Hank Hawk: I think the little woodchuck was afraid because the bear was so much bigger than she was.

Carla Bluejay: Yes, I think that was it. She was also afraid because she did not know the bear, and her mother told her not to talk to strangers.

Shelli Squirrel: At first I couldn't understand how she could be afraid of the bear! Now I see why.

Benny Frog: You're all doing a good job listening and talking. Listening to each other during a conversation helps give you something to say when it's your turn.

Ask the children:

- Why does Benny say the conversation is going well? (Everyone is listening and talking.)
- Why is listening important during a conversation? (So we can think of something to say when it's our turn.)

Benny Frog: Shelli, do you understand how to join a conversation now?

Shelli Squirrel: Yes, I do, Benny. You're all great friends to help me.

Ask the children:

- How did Shelli feel after she learned to join a conversation?
- What steps did Benny teach Shelli?

Review the skill steps, asking the children to repeat each one:

1. Listen to what people say.
2. Wait for your turn to talk.
3. Say what you think.

Invite the children to tell about times when they have felt awkward about joining a conversation or discussion.

Explain that joining a conversation and joining a class discussion are much the same. Point out that most of us participate in discussions or conversations every day, at home and in school.

Present Posters 1, 2, and 3, one at a time. Emphasize the fact that the skills the students learned for greeting people, intro-

ducing themselves, and listening (eye contact, friendly facial expression, and a pleasant tone of voice) are also important in starting and participating in a discussion. Display the posters during the remaining activities, using them to prompt or cue students as needed.

PRACTICE

Shelli Joins a Conversation Role Play

Materials

Four puppets (Shelli Squirrel, Benny Frog, Carla Bluejay, Hank Hawk)

Give the puppets to four children and ask them to sit in a circle. Benny Frog begins a conversation (you may want to suggest a topic or supply an opening sentence or question). Shelli Squirrel, Hank Hawk, and Carla Bluejay are to join the conversation in turn; prompt or cue children as necessary.

After the role play, discuss how the characters performed the skill. Go over the skill steps as needed, then give the puppets to four other children and repeat the role play. As time permits, allow each child to take a turn with a puppet. When all have participated, have various children role-play joining a conversation, this time without using the puppets. Encourage the group to offer the players feedback on the way they performed the skill.

Fruit Store

Materials

Pictures of fruit (or any set of pictures showing objects within a single category, such as vehicles, clothing, household utensils, tools); stickers

Ask the children to form groups of three to six students. Explain that they will practice joining conversations by playing a game called "Fruit Store." Give one child in each group a picture. The child with the picture is to say, "I'm going to the fruit store to buy a _____," naming the fruit and holding up the picture. The other students in the group are to take turns asking or saying something about the fruit or about someone else's statement or question.

Prompt children as necessary, perhaps supplying model sentences and questions, such as “What color is the fruit?” “Why are you buying that fruit?” “What will you do with the fruit?” “How much does the fruit cost?” or “I first tasted that fruit when. . . .”

Encourage each child to take part in the conversation. After everyone has participated, have the groups repeat the activity with new pictures. You might also repeat the activity with different sets of pictures or objects.

Give a sticker to each student who performs the skill steps adequately. Tell students who do not earn stickers that they will have other opportunities to practice the steps and receive stickers.

Adaptation

Follow up this activity by writing a cooperative story. In a small group, one student begins by dictating a sentence to someone else—for example, “I’m going to the fruit store to buy a. . . .” The student who recorded the sentence then passes the paper to someone else and dictates another sentence or question. Group members continue taking turns writing and speaking until everyone agrees that the story is finished.

Story Pictures

Materials

Pictures of familiar places, people, or things; stickers

Arrange the pictures face down. Tell the class that you are going to choose a picture and start a story about it. Then you’ll pause and call someone’s name. The student named is to select another picture and continue the story with a sentence or question relating the second picture to the first one. Coach or cue the children as needed.

For example, suppose you pick a picture of a trumpet. You could begin a story by saying, “I know a girl named Margaret who liked to toot on her trumpet. Luther?”

Luther picks another picture and continues the story. If he selects a picture of a tree, for example, he might say, “One day Margaret took her trumpet up a tree.”

Provide an appropriate ending to the story once you have run out of cards or participants. During the activity, emphasize that contributing to the story is the main objective, no matter how the story turns out.

Give a sticker to each student who performs the skill steps adequately. Tell students who do not earn stickers that they will have other opportunities to practice the steps and receive stickers.

Puzzle-Talking

Materials

Several puzzles; stickers

Select the first puzzle. Give one puzzle piece to each child. Have the puzzle board handy. Introduce the game by explaining that the group will have a discussion. Every time someone makes a contribution to the conversation, that person may bring a puzzle piece to the board and place it in the appropriate spot.

Begin a conversation on a topic of interest to the class.

As the conversation continues and children add pieces to the puzzle, the picture will begin to be recognizable. Have students keep the conversation going until the picture is complete (or nearly so). If necessary, encourage students to help each other make contributions. Repeat the activity using another puzzle.

Give a sticker to each student who performs the skill steps adequately. Tell students who do not earn stickers that they will have other opportunities to practice the steps and receive stickers.

Adaptations

1. As appropriate, choose a more complicated puzzle and give two or more pieces to each student.
2. Instead of a puzzle, use a large picture with places for students to fasten additions; for example, a tree with places for leaves, a train with spaces for cargo, a tiger with room for stripes, a clown with space for polka-dots.

MAINTENANCE

Joining a Conversation Every Day

Materials

Stickers

Observe students daily for opportunities to recognize and compliment those who contribute to a conversation. As appropriate, ask the children to tell you when they have used the skill and to

describe what they said and did. Give a sticker to each student who uses the skill.

Joining a Conversation in Literature

Materials

Classroom books and stories such as these:

Cohen, Miriam. *Will I Have a Friend?* New York: Macmillan, 1989.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *Apartment Three*. New York: Macmillan, 1986.

Wiseman, Bernard. *Morris and Boris at the Circus*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1990.

Wright, Dare. *The Lonely Doll*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Select stories that discuss or feature characters contributing to a conversation. After the children have read or listened to a story, discuss the ways that joining a conversation was important to the characters.

Conversation Bank

Materials

Child's bank or slotted box (such as a tissue box); coins (real or play money); blank label

Preparation

Write "Conversation Bank" on the label and fasten it to the bank or box.

Show the children the Conversation Bank, saying that joining a discussion is like saving money in a bank: The more you put into it, the more valuable it becomes. Explain that whenever someone contributes to this week's class conversation or discussion, you will add a coin to the bank. Use the Conversation Bank throughout the week to increase student interest and involvement in class discussions.

Encourage involvement by recognizing and soliciting contributions: "Good idea, Tom. I'm glad you added to our discussion." "Bess, how do you feel about that?" After each discussion, count the coins and reiterate the value of contributing to conversations.