

I

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:

Emily knows that saying something nice about Daniel’s tower is the best way to get herself an invitation to play.



Children can learn different ways to initiate conversations. Let’s take a closer look at how Emily does it, both with and without words:

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

Without Words

- > Use body actions, such as standing near the other person.
- > Look at the other person’s face.
- > Smile at the other person.
- > Tap the other person on the shoulder.
- ... *and* wait for a response.

With Words

- > Use a standard greeting.
- > Use the person’s name.
- > Ask an easy-to-answer opening question, such as “How are you?”
- > Make a comment:
 - Give a compliment
 - Comment on what’s happening
 - Share some information
- ... *and* wait for a response.

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

MY CHILD STARTS A CONVERSATION BY:		NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	WITHOUT WORDS	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
Getting someone's attention	Says the person's name	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stands near the person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
					Looks at the person's face	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
					Taps the person on the shoulder	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Example of how my child gets someone's attention:

Greeting someone	E.g., “Hi”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Faces the person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
					Smiles at the person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Example of how my child greets someone:

Asking an opening question	“Hi. How are you?”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Looks at the person and waits for an answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	“Hi. What's your name?”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
	“What are you doing?”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

Example of some opening questions my child uses:

Saying something nice	Gives a compliment, e.g., “Cool truck!”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Looks at the person when he says something nice and then waits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Example of what my child says/does:

Conversation Checklist #1 continued

MY CHILD STARTS A CONVERSATION BY:	WITH WORDS	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	WITHOUT WORDS	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
Talking about something that happened in the past	E.g., “I went to the zoo.”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Looks at the person and then waits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Example of what my child says/does:								
Talking about something that will happen in the future	E.g., “I’m going to go to camp.”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Looks at the person and then waits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Example of what my child says/does:								
Asking another about feelings, likes/dislikes	“Are you having fun?” “What do you like to play?”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Looks at the person and then waits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Example of what my child says/does:								



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.