



# Conversation Skills

## Entering Conversations

Available in the format below:



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## **Entering Conversations**

This handout provides an outline of the behaviors required to enter an ongoing conversation, including observation, gaining physical proximity, identifying topics, timing, commenting/questioning, determination of acceptance, and exit strategies. The handout can be used for discussion and/or role-play to help individuals on the autism spectrum improve their conversational skills, expand their knowledge of social dynamics, and increase their confidence to initiate interactions.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Entering Conversations

### 1) Watch and Listen

- don't stare, just glance occasionally
- can use phone or book as a prop

Reasons to listen in:

- to find out the topic
- to decide if the people may be open to you joining them

### 2) Physically move a little closer

### 3) Wait for a pause (don't wait for a "perfect" pause)

### 4) Make a comment or ask a question on topic

- can do with physical commitment (moving into their space)
- can do without physical commitment

### 5) Determine if you are being accepted

Signs of acceptance:

- eye contact
- smiling
- talking to you
- physically turning toward you
- opening the "circle"

Note: Don't take it personally if you are not accepted!

This happens approximately 50% of the time for everyone

### 6) Exit if not accepted

- first, start to look away
- next, start to turn away
- last, walk away, possibly with a casual exit statement



## Therapeutic Notes: Entering Conversations

You can find a video demonstrating these steps to enter a conversation on [wrongplanet.net](http://wrongplanet.net) “How to Join a Social Circle & Make Friends in a Group”. As is demonstrated in the video, today’s technology really helps individuals on the autism spectrum (as well as all of us!) avoid looking awkward when alone and following step one’s eavesdropping recommendation; it is so common to see people looking at their phones that no one thinks twice. I do recommend to my students that when they follow step four to actually enter the conversation verbally, they might want to start with an apologetic comment such as, “sorry, but I couldn’t help overhearing...”

I also make sure I always discuss handling rejection with my students. I discuss a version of the stereotypical breakup line “it’s not you, it’s me”, namely, “it’s not you, it’s them” so try not to take it personally (unless you should, of course). I feel it can also help, if you believe it would be appropriate in the context you are working with your students, to tell them of your own experiences of rejection. That way they can see that rejection is universal; it doesn’t only happen to people with diagnosed social pragmatic disorders, and they can hopefully learn they are not alone. Harlan Cohen, the author of the wonderful instructional book *The Naked Roommate*, describes the Universal Rejection Truths in his TED Talk “Getting Comfortable with the Uncomfortable”. He explains how not everyone will like you, purchase your products or services, or want to spend time with you, but some people will. Back to the main message: if you are rejected don’t take it personally. So many of our students have suffered rejection and been bullied. We all do our best to build up their self-esteem, and in doing so, increase the likelihood that they will be more willing to “put themselves out there” to take a social chance.

