**Conversational Skills**

Some children need to be taught the ‘rules’ of conversation as they don’t pick them up automatically.

They may have difficulties in one or several of the following areas

* taking turns in conversation
* asking for help
* greeting people / initiating conversations
* knowing how much to say
* identifying whether the person they are talking to is interested in what they are saying

**Activities / strategies to support these skills**

**The rules of turn taking in conversation**

* Turn taking rules need to be demonstrated and acted out with the child in structured familiar small group activities and then the child will need lots of encouragement to use the ‘rules’ in real life.
* In these situations it is essential that an adult or a good role model takes the first turn to show the child what to do and to model the language they require to initiate, continue or close an interaction with another person.
* You will need to show the child several times and may need to use visual and verbal prompts, e.g. tell me one thing about what it looks like.

**Using ‘talking with toys’ to support turn taking in conversation in a group setting**

* Ask the children to bring in a toy from home.
* Encourage them to show their toy to the group and to say a little bit about it.
* Ask the children if they think any of the toys would like to ‘play together’.
* One child sits in the middle of the circle with their toy.
* You model asking to play, e.g. ‘Can my bear play with your rabbit?’
* Let the children have a turn asking you, or each other, to play.

**Encouraging the child to use language to ask for help**

* Set up situations or activities with one thing missing, e.g. no pencils/crayons out on the colouring in table or no scissors / glue at the craft table. The child then has to directly ask for help.
* Model the language the child needs to ask a peer or an adult for pencils / crayons e.g. ‘Can I have a crayon please?’

**Supporting the child to greet people/ start conversations**

* Sit and say nothing – make the children start off a conversation with you. This will feel strange at first but it is a good way to teach the child that they can start a conversation.
* If the child is struggling model the language they could use to greet you and examples of questions they might ask. Remember to add pauses in your interactions and see if the child initiates interaction with you. You might want to play with a particularly motivating toy that the child may initiate communication with you about.

**Supporting the child who sometimes says too much**

* Remind the child that the other person needs to have a turn to talk too.
* Keep asking the child how they think their partner feels.
* When a child talks too frequently about a specific topic, make a rule about when that topic can /cannot be introduced into conservation.
* Use a clear signal, such as a picture cue, gesture or code word, to remind the child.

**Supporting the child who frequently changes the topic**

* If a child changes the topic of conversation, it might be because they don’t fully understand or they have made inappropriate connections in their mind.
* When this happens, gently refocus them and remind them how their conversation partner feels when they start talking about something different.

**Supporting the child who asks repetitive questions**

* At times, a child may ask repetitive questions because they are anxious or because they want some control over the conversation.
* If they keep asking irrelevant questions, don’t answer them, explain why it is irrelevant and explain when a good time would be to ask that question.