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Chapter Two

HOW TO TALK TO ANYBODY . . . AND EVERYBODY!

Learning how to talk to people is a bit like riding a bike for the first time. It can seem tricky. With a bike, you might need some training wheels, so you can practice riding while building your confidence. As you go, you might worry you'll fall off and get hurt. You might get frustrated that it seems as if everyone around you can ride with ease. You might even want to give up or just completely avoid it! But just be patient—once you master how to do it, riding a bike becomes super easy.

Guess what? The same goes with learning how to talk to people. It can be scary at first. You might be thinking, *How do I start a conversation? What should I ask? How does a conversation end? What if my feelings get hurt?*

But when you learn how to talk to people one step at a time, one small pedal at a time, it won't seem as scary. Before you know it, you'll say, *What was all that worrying about? I can totally do this!* When you do things in small bites, building skills of any kind can lead to big changes and awesome progress. So let's go take some small bites and get you on your way!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Starting a conversation can be overwhelming. What should you say? Think of it this way: Just as you might plan your moves in soccer before the actual game, planning your conversation starters before an actual conversation can make you feel more prepared.

A conversation starter is a question you can ask someone to get a conversation going. Asking a question about someone's interests is a great way to get a conversation going. People LOVE talking about themselves!

Give it a try—can you come up with some good conversation starters for these situations?

A classmate is holding a ball and standing alone on the playground.

A neighbor is walking his dog.

A friend comes over to your house to play.

If you came up with ideas, great! If you are still not sure what to ask, that's okay, too—I've got you covered. Read on!

CONVERSATION STARTERS, *continued*

BONUS ACTIVITY

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Here are a few possible conversation starters. Pick one of my suggestions from the list and do a social experiment. Go up to someone you know and try out one of the conversation starters on them. It's better to try out new skills on people you know at first.

Once you've completed your social experiment, come back and answer the questions that follow.

Pick one of these conversation starters to try:

- How was your weekend? What did you do?
- Do you play [insert your favorite video game or hobby]? What's your favorite video game [or hobby]?
- Do you watch [insert your favorite TV show]? What's your favorite thing to watch?
- Do you have any pets? What are their names?
- I like your shirt [or other object]. Where did you get it?

Did you do it? How did it go?

Who did you ask?

What was the person's response?

How did you feel asking the question?

The more practice you get starting conversations, the easier it will become!

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GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE QUESTIONS

Asking people questions can be a good thing! It shows that you're interested in them and that you care about what they have to say. But finding the right amount of questions to ask is important. When you ask too many questions, you might seem nosy. When you ask too few questions, it might seem like you don't care.

Do you remember the story about Goldilocks and the three bears? One porridge was too hot, one was too cold, and one was just right.

Let's play a new version of that. Below are three conversations. One shows a boy asking too many questions, one shows a boy asking too few questions, and one shows a boy asking just the right number.

Directions

Next to each conversation, circle if you think the questions Tom asks are **Too Few**, **Too Many**, or **Just Right**.

- Tom saw that his friend John was wearing a cast on his leg. Tom went up to the boy and asked, "What happened?" John said he fell. Tom asked, "On what?" John responded, "Off my bed." Tom asked, "How on earth did that happen?" John said, "I rolled off." Tom replied, "How can you just roll off your bed?"

Too Few / **Too Many** / **Just Right**

- Tom saw that his friend John was wearing a cast on his leg. Tom went up to John and asked, "Do you want to play?" John said, "Okay."

Too Few / **Too Many** / **Just Right**

- Tom saw that his friend John was wearing a cast on his leg. Tom went up to John and asked, "What happened?" John said he fell. Tom asked, "On what?" John responded, "Off my bed." Tom said, "I'm sorry that happened. I hope it gets better soon."

Too Few / **Too Many** / **Just Right**

Answer Key

1. Too many. 2. Too few. 3. Just right.

GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE QUESTIONS, *continued*

BONUS ACTIVITY

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Start paying attention to how many questions you ask people around you. If you think you are starting to ask too many, pull back and become a good listener. If you think you don't typically ask enough questions, start pushing yourself to ask a few more. With practice this will start to feel natural for you.

Just as you want to ask the right number of questions, it's also important to ask questions that are appropriate. When Tom asked John, "How can you just roll off your bed?" that question was not just "too much," it was also a little unkind and really did not consider John's feelings.

When you practice asking questions, try to put yourself in the listener's shoes. Think about this: *Is the question I'm asking kind? Is the question I'm asking necessary?* When you put yourself in someone else's shoes, you're able to understand how they feel when they hear your questions. And this makes you a better friend!

THROW IT BACK!

Do you want to learn a cool ninja trick to keep conversations going? This is going to sound kind of silly, but it really works! Anytime someone asks you a question, just throw it back. Think about playing catch: What do you do when someone throws you the ball? You throw it back.

The same can happen in conversations. It's easy. If someone asks you a question, you answer and then throw back the same question to them. Remember, people like talking about themselves. Asking questions is a great way to make people know you care, and a simple way to do that is by throwing back questions that are thrown at you.

For example, if someone asks you:

What are you doing over summer break?

You would throw it back with something like:

I'm going to camp. What are you doing over summer break?

Simple enough, right? Okay, your turn. Let's give it a spin.

Directions

For each question below, throw back a question. Write your answers in the space provided.

How are you?

How was your weekend?

THROW IT BACK!, *continued*

What did you do last night?

Did you do the homework?

What are you doing at recess?

Pretty simple, right?

KEEP THE CONVERSATION BALL MOVING

Remember how we talked about throwing questions back in our last activity? Well, in this activity we are going to continue playing ball, but we're going to add some new skills. Once again, think about conversations as a game of catch. When you play catch, you don't just sit there and hold the ball, right? No, that would be rude. Instead, you throw the ball back.

The same thing happens with conversations. When someone throws you the ball by asking you a question, it's your job to answer and then throw the ball back by asking them a question. That's how you keep a conversation going.

Let's break it down:

1. Someone throws you the ball (they ask you a question)

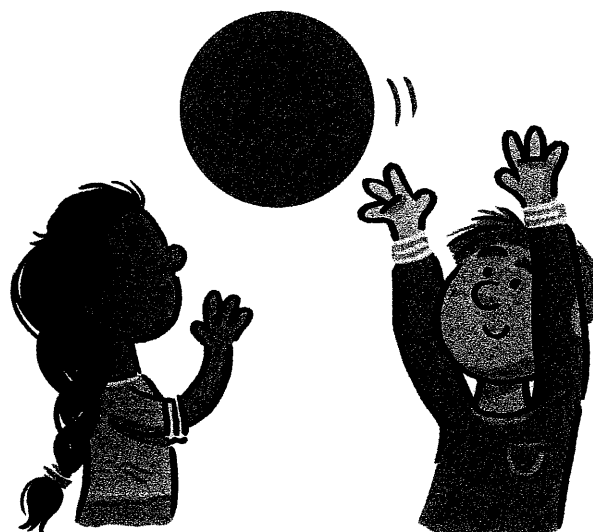
Them: How was your weekend?

2. You hold the ball (and answer their question)

You: It was good, thanks. We went to the football game.

3. You throw the ball back (and ask them a question)

You: Did you go to the game? OR What did **YOU** do this weekend?



Do you see how you can take the time to answer the question and then throw back a question? The question can be the exact question they asked you (as we did in activity 9) or a new question related to how you answered their question.

Let's practice!

KEEP THE CONVERSATION BALL MOVING, *continued*

Directions

Play conversation ball and fill in the blanks with how you could answer. Remember to answer the other person's question and then offer up a question to them.

1. Them: How did you do on that math test?

Your response:

The question you throw back:

2. Them: Did you hear the storm last night?

Your response:

The question you throw back:

3. Them: What are you doing this summer?

Your response:

The question you throw back:

BONUS ACTIVITY

For bonus points, try this skill in the real world. The next time someone asks you a question, try to see how long you can bounce the conversation ball back. Keeping a conversation going is an awesome skill to add to your social skill superpowers—it helps you get to know others, make friends, and let people know you are fun to talk to.

INTERRUPTION EXPERIMENT

Interrupting someone while they are talking can really ruin a conversation. It's too bad, because people don't usually interrupt on purpose. People interrupt for all sorts of reasons. Here are just a few:

- They have something important to say
- They don't want to forget what they were going to say
- They are upset and want to get their point in
- They aren't paying attention to what the other person is saying

Regardless of the reason, it can make the other person feel upset. Have you ever been interrupted when you were speaking? How did it make you feel?

Let's test out what happens when you interrupt.

Directions

Sometimes you may not realize how it seems when you are constantly interrupting someone. It can be hard for us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes—especially when we are talking.

Read the conversation here, and then answer the questions that follow.

BRAD: *I love that video game! I play that all the time.*

SARAH: *Me, too.*

BRAD: *Did you get the latest update?*

SARAH: *Yeah, I just...*

BRAD: *I did. It is so much better than the last one.*

SARAH: *I know, I was playing it and...*

BRAD: *I got past level 5 last night and I've only been playing it for two days.*

SARAH: *Oh wow—what's...*

BRAD: *The controls are so much easier in this version.*

SARAH: *I know. I thought the...*

BRAD: *I wonder when the next version will come out. Maybe next year?*

INTERRUPTION EXPERIMENT, *continued*

How do you think Sarah felt throughout this conversation?

Do you think Sarah enjoyed talking to Brad? Why or why not?

What could Brad have done differently?

BONUS ACTIVITY

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Start a conversation with someone in your family. Tell them you are going to do an experiment, then ask them some questions to get the conversation going. Interrupt them three times as they start to talk. Come back and answer the following questions. (Don't forget to tell them at the end you were doing an experiment on interrupting, and to please excuse you for frustrating them!)

What expression did they have on their face?

Did they seem to get more and more frustrated?

Did they grow annoyed or angry at you?

Did they eventually stop trying to talk to you?

It's helpful to be aware of how often you interrupt others. Many kids (and grown-ups, too!) aren't aware that they are even doing this. Once you start paying attention to how often you interrupt, you can build up your skills around being patient, listening, and taking turns—all great ways to make and keep friends.

NO ONE'S THE BOSS OF US!

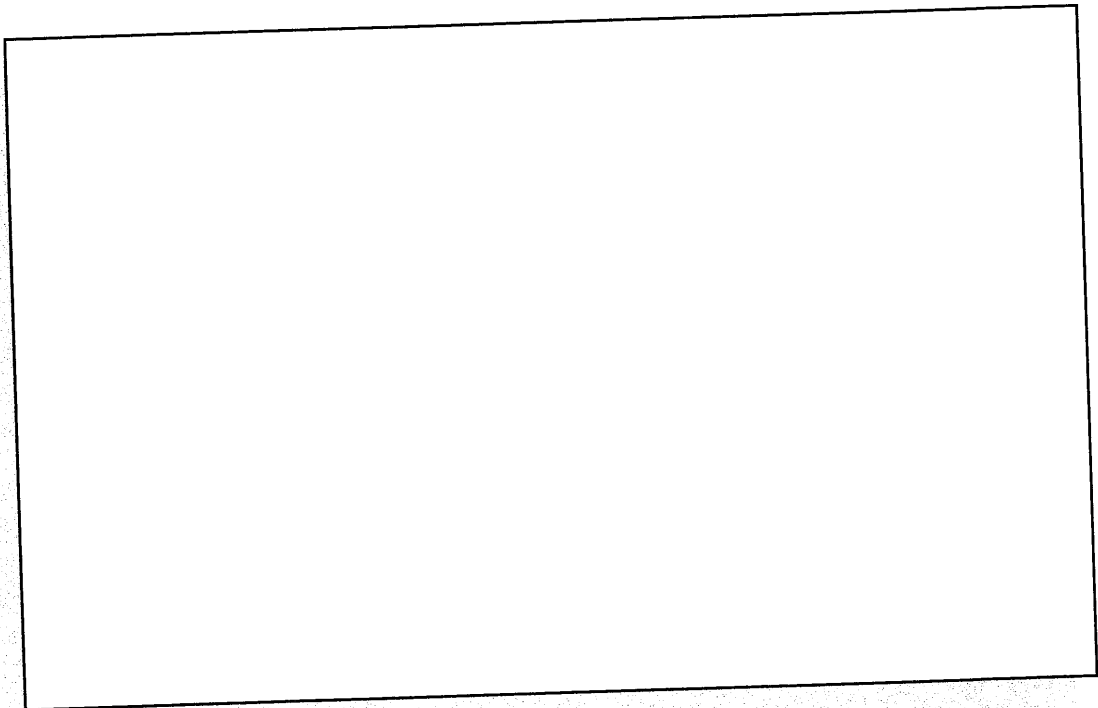
Do you know what it means to be bossy? When someone is being bossy, they tell you what to do and maybe even *how* to do it. They don't give you a chance to do what you want to do or be who you want to be. Sounds pretty bad, don't you think? But sometimes we can be bossy without even knowing it! Wouldn't you like to know if you are ever being bossy? I know I would. This is definitely an important social skill to know.

Bossy kids might:

- Tell you what games you can play
- Tell you what to do in class
- Tell you how to think or what to say to others
- Tell you who you can play with and who you can't

Directions

Think of a person you know who is bossy. Draw how you feel when they boss you around. What feelings do you have? List them after your picture.



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Now that you know how it feels to be bossed around, you can be extra aware when you might be doing it yourself. Being bossed around is not a fun feeling. If you are ever bossy, it might just be because you are afraid that you won't get your way, or that others won't listen to you unless you force yourself into the conversation. But while bossiness might get you your way today, it doesn't build healthy relationships..

Start to pay attention to when you might be sounding too bossy, so you can catch it right away. Maybe you can even stop bossiness in its tracks and say, "But that's just my opinion. What do you think?" The sooner we are aware of our behavior, the sooner we can fix it and get back on track to making great connections with others.

SPIDERWEB TALKS

You are really picking up some skills! Now you know how to start a conversation and how to keep it going. You even know how to stop bossiness in its tracks. But there is another key ingredient we haven't talked about yet—staying on topic.

When you are talking to someone, conversation flows more naturally when you stay on topic. That means you talk about the same things the other person is talking about.

For instance, if your friend is talking about tennis, you wouldn't suddenly start talking about football. That would make your friend feel that you weren't listening or that you didn't care about what they were saying.

It's okay to change topics; you just have to be a bit smooth about it.

For example, say your friend is talking about tennis and you want to talk about football. You can change topics by saying something like, "Tennis sounds like a great sport—I've never tried it. My favorite sport is football."

Do you see how you linked the topic "sports," but changed the theme to football?

Let's practice!

What you need

Someone in your family

Directions

Have a conversation with someone in your family. When they talk, have them write the question they ask you and draw a circle around it. When you respond and ask your question, do the same thing—write it down and circle it. Then draw a line connecting their circle to your circle. Go back and forth until you have a conversation spiderweb. Do you see how all the topics are interconnected? Conversations are more enjoyable when the topics are all linked.

Here's an example of how such a conversation would go:

DAD: *Did you have fun at school today?*

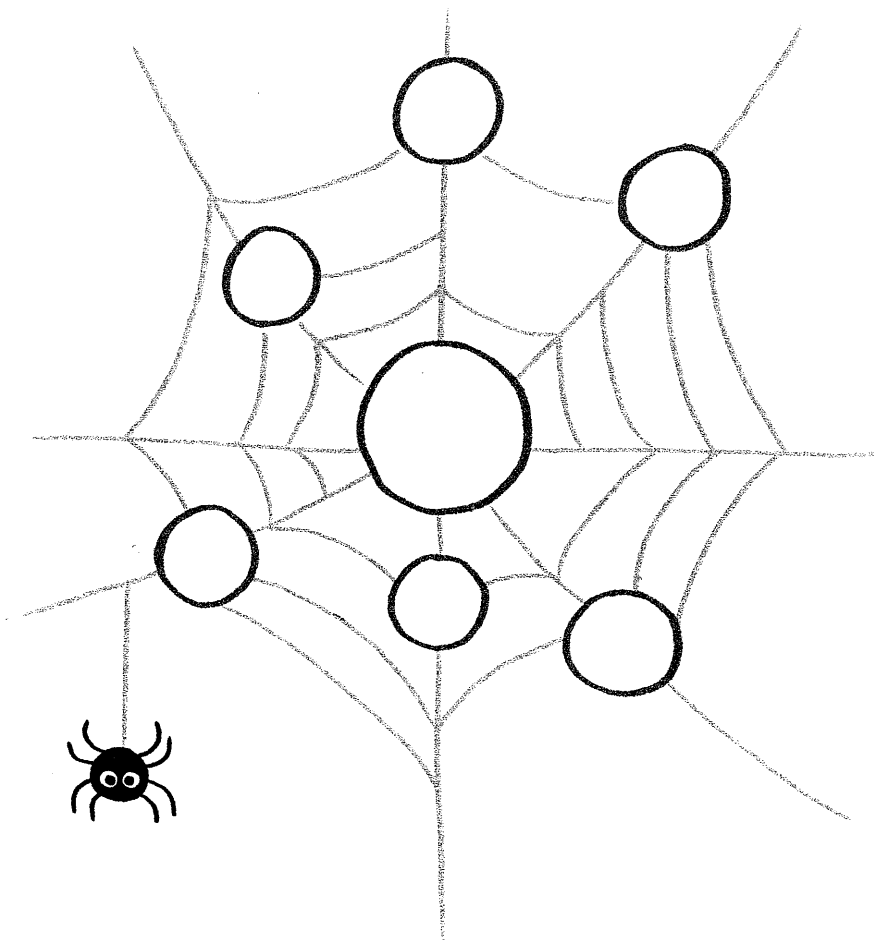
YOU: *I forgot my lunch money, but I got an A on my math test. (You think for a second.) Um, how was your day?*

DAD: *It was good. What did you eat for lunch?*

YOU: *The cafeteria gave me a cheese sandwich. (You think for a second.) What did you eat for lunch?*

DAD: *A salad. Your cheese sandwich sounds better. Did you finish your homework so you can watch the game tonight?*

YOU: *Yes, but can we watch a movie instead?*



Activity 14

I'M INTERESTED! GIVING BODY LANGUAGE CLUES

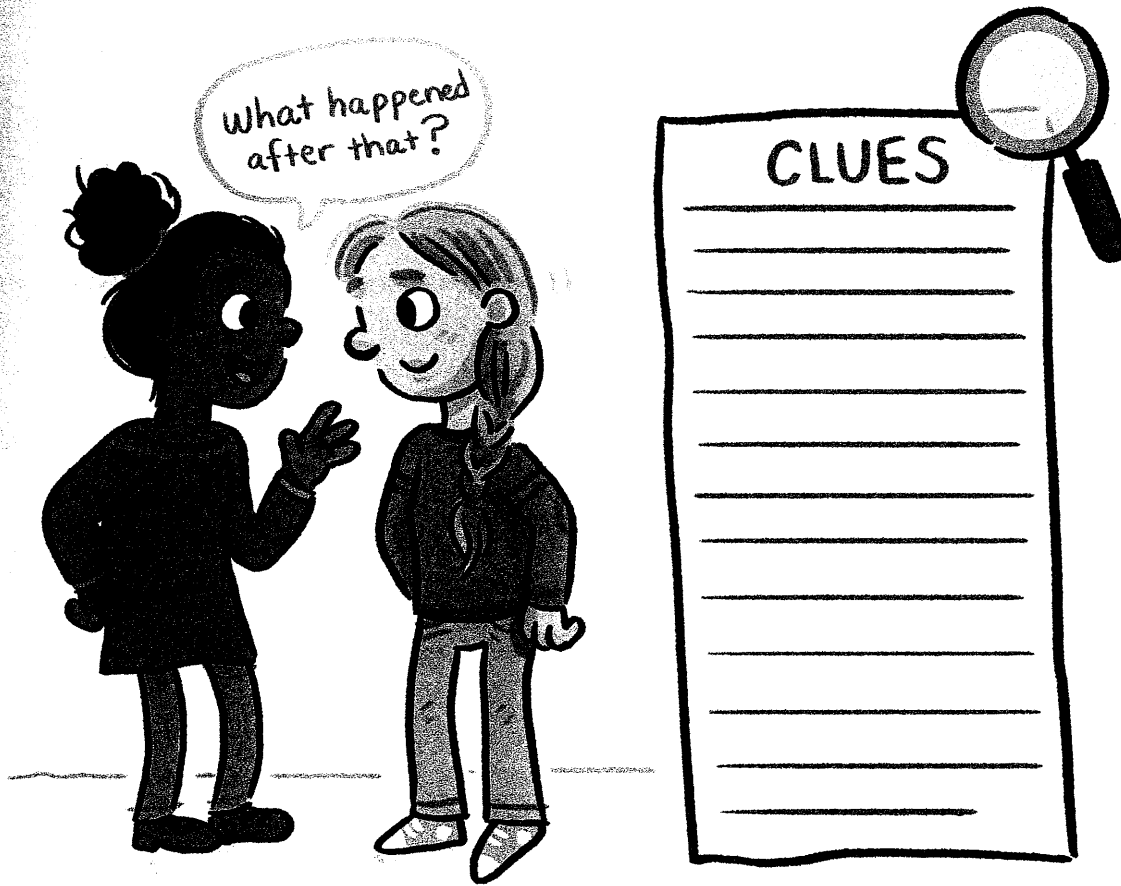
When you're talking to someone, it's nice to show you are interested in what they say. Even if you don't care too much about what they're saying, it can be a good friend-maker to try to show some interest. But if you *love* what they are talking about but forget to show it, they'll think you don't care! And you don't want people to think you don't care, because that can be a friendship killer.

But wait—there are many ways to show someone you are interested in what they have to say. Here are just a few things you can do:

- Make eye contact
- Nod in agreement when they speak
- Change your expressions depending on what they are telling you
- Ask questions about what they are talking about
- Lean in just a bit
- Focus on the person talking
- Don't look at other people or things

Directions

Look at the picture on the next page. Can you spot the clues that show the girl is listening to her friend? Circle the clues and make a list of what you find.



BONUS ACTIVITY

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How do you show others that you are listening? Pay attention to what types of clues you give. If you find you aren't giving enough clues, try adding a few of the things we talked about. Do you notice any changes? Does the speaker continue speaking or become more excited? If so, you're probably doing a great job showing you care.

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE—ALREADY?

Phew, we've covered a lot of social skills in just one chapter! Now it's time for us to say goodbye. No, the book isn't done—we're just going to learn how to say goodbye in a conversation. All good conversations must come to an end, but they don't have to end awkwardly.

Just as we had some good conversation starters, let's have some good conversation enders that we can have prepackaged and ready to use. Conversation enders are important because they help you leave the chat on a positive note. Good enders can leave people feeling that it was a good conversation and that you would like to talk again sometime.

Here are some examples of great ways to end a conversation:

Well, it was great talking to you.

I have to get back to [whatever you were doing before you started]. Let's talk again sometime.

We should get together sometime. We'll have to plan it. But I have to go.

I have to run, but it was nice talking to you.

I have to go. We should hang out again; it was cool talking to you.

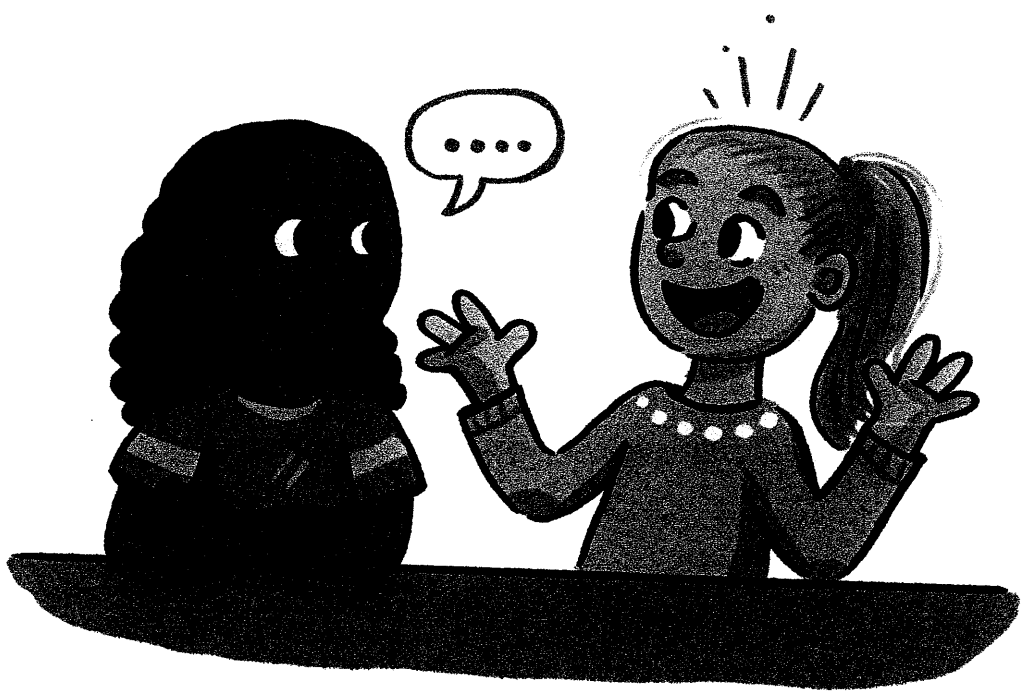
Can you think of any others? List them here:

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BONUS ACTIVITY

Choose a conversation ender from the list or make up your own on the fly. The next time you're talking to someone, use one of your prepackaged conversation enders. How did the person respond? The more you practice using them, the easier ending a conversation will become.



TOP 10 TIPS FOR TALKING TO ADULTS

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Talking to grown-ups is a little different from talking to kids. It's basically about respect. You'll recognize some of the tips from the skills you learned to talk to other kids, and there are new tips, too. These are great skills to practice with parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, bus drivers, or any other grown-ups:

1. Make and keep eye contact.
2. Try to answer questions with more than just a "yes," or "no."
3. Show that you are interested by focusing on the conversation.
4. Throw back questions they asked you to show interest.
5. Be polite by using words like "thank you" and "you, too."
6. Speak up and don't mumble.
7. Don't interrupt—wait your turn to speak.
8. Don't talk disrespectfully.
9. If you disagree, do it in a polite way.
10. End the conversation with one of your conversation enders.

Why does it matter? Being respectful to grown-ups is the right thing to do, and it has many rewards. Today, it will help boost your reputation as a nice and polite kid; tomorrow, these skills may get you the job you want—so practice that firm handshake, too!

YOU CRACKED THE CODE!

You are well on your way to having some awesome social skills! In this chapter, you've already learned:

- How to start a conversation
- How to ask questions
- How to keep the conversation flowing
- How to not be too bossy or interrupt
- How to bounce questions back
- How to keep conversations on topic
- How to end a conversation

Feeling more confident? When you know the tricks to having a conversation, you have a huge skill under your belt. Once you master that, everything else will fall into place. Yep, you've just added some big super-power social skills.

Next, we'll move on to our listening skills. Being a good listener is one of the most important ingredients in being a friend. So listen up! I'm going to teach you what it takes to be a great listener.