

HOW TO TALK TO PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW



WHY LEARN THIS SKILL?

You are surrounded by people you don't know: at school, in shops, on the phone, sometimes at parties or a new workplace. It can feel daunting talking to someone you don't know anything about, who doesn't know you. But you can overcome this obstacle by developing the skills you'll need to have an enjoyable conversation.

WHAT?

Learn the skills you'll need to have a polite and pleasant conversation with someone you don't know.

INSTRUCTIONS:

You will need:

- Your voice
- Someone to practise with

WHAT TO DO:

- 01 Smile.** Think of how you feel if someone speaks to you with a stern or serious face. Now, think of how you feel if someone smiles warmly at you. A smile goes a long way to put others at ease, which will also make you feel more comfortable. So, take a deep breath and smile genuinely.
- 02 Greetings.** A simple, 'Hello,' can often break the ice. Often, you'll need to be the first person to say hello. It's always polite to ask, 'How are you?' Keep your tone friendly and relaxed, and most often the other person will respond in kind. You've just kicked off your conversation!
- 03 Crash the group.** You're at an event, let's say the opening evening for a conference, or a networking event. Guess what? You (yes, you!) have 100% absolutely the right to walk up to anyone and any group of people in the room. Try it. Take a deep breath, smile widely, walk confidently towards a gap between two elbows in a group of people. It may be polite to wait, smile and nod if someone is talking when you arrive at the group. You can then say, with confidence and a smile 'Hi everyone, I'm [your name]. Are we having a nice time?' Yes, it sounds basic, but it always works, and if you are shy, you can learn this one and use it until you feel good at this.
- 04 Body language is key.** A lot of your communication will be non-verbal. Try to keep your body language relaxed. For example, don't cross your arms, make sure you're facing the person and make eye contact throughout your chat. Turn to face each person in the group as you speak, to make sure they are all included.

Body Language Australia has some helpful tips: www.bodylanguageaustralia.com/

WHAT TO DO CONT:

05 Comment on the situation. Consider the context of where you are and make a comment to invite the other person to reply. For example, if you're meeting in a new project team, you can admit how excited or nervous you are about the topic. Being honest about your thoughts can help others open up too.

06 Ask questions. The best way to engage in conversation is to ask the other person open-ended questions. Be sure to listen, showing respect, interest and courtesy with your body language. You can respond to their answers with a comment or further question. This shows you're interested in who you're speaking with. Good, open questions are; 'Have you come a long way to get here today?' 'What do you think of the event so far?'

Reach Out has some great tips for meeting new people and overcoming shyness:

<https://au.reachout.com/relationships/meeting-new-people>

07 Respond in kind. Be willing to answer any questions you're asked. Be sure to offer answers that provide a little information, instead of only few words. This helps the conversation feel two-way, instead of like an interview. You may need to work to keep the ball bouncing at first, but it will get smoother.

08 End with ease. You can wrap up your conversation with a phrase such as, 'Have a great day,' or something specific to what you've been chatting about: 'Good luck with the project,' or 'See you next time!' If the conversation is a one-off, it's always polite to end with, 'It was great to meet you/ speak with you.'

09 Practise helps. You can practise get-to-know-you types of conversations with friends or family. Pretend you've just met and ask questions to find out more about them. Also, practise answering questions and maintaining friendly body language.



GOT IT?

➤ You're confident in approaching people you don't know and having enjoyable conversations with them.



TRY THIS

If you feel like you've nailed it but you want to level up, try this:

- Watch a TED Talk about body language or first impressions.
- Read about how you can improve your self-esteem. Health Direct has tips on this: www.healthdirect.gov.au/self-esteem
- Try having a conversation with someone you usually wouldn't, such as a teacher who hasn't taught you before, or a peer in the canteen line.

SO WHAT?

- Knowing how to talk to people you don't know greatly improves your communication skills, which comes in handy every day, in every interaction you have.
- Your confidence and self-esteem will grow. This can reduce anxiety and help you in all aspects of life.
- You'll learn how to strengthen relationships and friendships, or gain new ones!

WHAT ACTION WILL YOU TAKE?

- Do some research into body language and great conversation starters.
- Write a few of your favourite general open-ended questions to ask someone. Think of your own answers to these questions.



IF YOU LIKED THIS ONE YOU MIGHT WANT TO TRY...

- How to Introduce Yourself to Someone
- How to Make a Business Phone Call
- How to Give a Compliment and Receive One
- How to Ask Great Questions
- How to Pitch an Idea