



## EXPERT LEVEL

# LESSON 12 CUSTOMIZE

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**GOAL:** For the Conversation Coach and the parents to identify and formulate a plan for improving specific conversation skills which have either not been addressed in the CMC program or have been addressed but are considered to be in need of further skill development.

### MATERIALS:

- The Customized Conversation Checklist
- The Conversation Recipe
- The Field Trip Goals and Review Sheet

*“One cannot give what they do not have,  
and some may not have because they have not learned!”*

## NEW TWISTS ON OLD CONVERSATIONS

### GENERAL RULES

In Color My Conversation, the children work through the program to the highest level that they are capable of attaining. Regardless of the skill level achieved, the following general conversational rules can be applied for most children.

The explanation of these rules should be done at a level of understanding so that the children can apply them successfully.

1. **Be Polite** – Remember that you have the ability to influence others both negatively and positively based on your conversation skills. “Please! – Thank you! - You’re Welcome! – Excuse Me!” These words have power!
2. **Use Eye Contact** - Remember that natural eye contact is a combination of looking directly at someone’s eyes and glancing at their face, their body or at other things around them. It is important to Stay in the Frame of your conversation partner. This benefits you in two ways. Firstly, you will be able to read your conversation partner better. Secondly, there is a greater chance that your conversation partner will enjoy the conversation, because you are validating their presence and demonstrating good social skills!
3. **Be Observant** - Pay attention to personal space by being aware of where you are in relation to your conversation partner. Pay attention to your nonverbal communication. Pay attention to your conversation partner’s nonverbal communication. When you are being observant of these things, it helps you learn how to “Match or Manage” your nonverbal/verbal interactions with others.

## CUSTOMIZED CONVERSATIONS

The following provides a list of some specific conversations and social interactions: which may or may not include oral language. The Conversation Coach may teach these concepts at the end of the *CMC* program, however, they can also be incorporated into the lessons at any point after the Beginner Level. The Conversation Coach will consider the child's age, level of cognitive and communicative ability and "need to know" when selecting goals from this list.

### NOTE:

There are many cultural nuances that can affect the following examples. As such, the Conversation Coach will keep this in mind when preparing lesson plans. For example, if the coach were to work with a group of children who were second language learners, the cultural practice done in the home environment might be added to the lesson activities.

**1. First Introduction Conversations:** Children can often benefit from role-playing first introductions so that they can gain confidence with this important initial social interaction. The following is an example of teaching a "formal introduction:"

- a. Provide the script or the language that the child will likely need to know; both as the person doing the introduction (i.e. "\_\_\_\_\_, I would like you to meet my friend \_\_\_\_\_.") and as the person being introduced (i.e. "Pleased to meet you.").
- b. Provide the steps that outline the nonverbal ritual associated with the introduction. For example: Make eye contact. Smile. Shake right hand. These instructions may also include a discussion about proxemics (i.e. how close to stand to someone you haven't met) or other specific details (i.e. how to give a firm handshake).

### NOTE:

The Conversation Coach will determine what types of introductions would be needed for the individual child.

**2. Entering a Conversation in Progress:** Knowing how to interrupt a conversation that is already underway requires skill. It should seem natural and seamless if done well. The Conversation Coach will provide examples of scripts (i.e. the language) and nonverbal communication that the children might consider for specific social interactions. Two possible examples are provided below:

- a. **Joining a conversation that is already underway:** Stay a comfortable distance away from the group and wait for a break or pause in the conversation. When the break happens, make eye contact with the person you are going to speak with. Use a thinking sound (i.e. uhm), a hand gesture, or a smile as you make a comment to the last one stated. As you do this, step closer to the group.
- b. **If you are interrupting a group for a specific purpose:** You will likely excuse yourself and then state the purpose (i.e. Excuse me for interrupting, but the teacher has asked us to come back to class right away).

**3. Exiting a Conversation Quickly:** Through the previous lessons, we will have talked about ways that we prepare to exit a conversation with our conversation partner(s). We might use words and sounds such as "(sigh) Well (pause)" before we move on to our Conversation Stopper. We might also give other nonverbal cues (i.e. look away, look at our watch, shift our body) as we prepare to exit the conversation. So what do we do when we need to leave a conversation abruptly? The Conversation Coach will provide examples of scripts (i.e. the language) and nonverbal communication that the child might consider for specific social situations. Two possible examples are provided below:

- a. **If you are talking on the phone:** You might state the person's name and wait for their response (i.e. Yes?). Excuse yourself and state the reason why you need to stop the conversation (i.e. I'm sorry, but I need to cut this short. I just realized that I have a dentist appointment.). Follow up with a Conversation Stopper (i.e. It was great chatting with you!) and a Farewell (i.e. See you next week!).
- b. **If you are talking in person:** You might look at your watch and make a comment (i.e. Oh, my goodness!). Excuse yourself, and then state the reason why you need to stop the conversation (i.e. I'm so sorry. I lost track of time. I've got to get to my next class!). Follow up with a Conversation Stopper (i.e. It was great chatting with you!) and a Farewell (i.e. See you next week!).

**4. Compliments and Gifts Conversations:** Children can often benefit from reminders about the importance of being thankful. It is easier to be verbally thankful when one receives a gift, however, many children may not know what to say when given verbal praise. Adults can often struggle in this area as well. Giving and receiving compliments is an important social function for everyone to learn!

When you think about it, a compliment is really a gift wrapped in words! The following activity describes how physical gifts can be used to teach the children about the power of words! The Conversation Coach will do the following:

- a. Consider one of the children you feel will benefit most from this activity.
- b. Go to the local dollar store and purchase a small gift, a card and two identical gift bags or wrapping paper.
- c. Take time to think about what you value most about the child. Write your thoughts down on the card.
- d. Take time to nicely wrap the gift and the card in separate packages.
- e. During the lesson, invite the child up, offer the package with the small gift in it and say, "I have a gift for you."
- f. Allow the child time to open the package, enjoy the gift and show appreciation.
- g. Then bring out the second package and say, "I have another gift for you."
- h. Allow the child time to open the package and read the card.
- i. The children are often touched by the kind words. Some may say "thank you," and some may not know what to say. That's okay. Take time to explain to the children that both of the gifts are of great value. They both took time and thought to prepare. In fact, the gift of words is often much more significant in the affect it has on one's heart or sense of self.
- j. Explain that we can be thankful for both physical gifts and verbal compliments. The way that we show our thankfulness is to simply say, "Thank you!"

**NOTE:**

If a gift is being given to one child, the Conversation Coach may want to consider whether or not the other children should also receive a small gift. Either way, writing a nice note for the other children might be considered.

**5. Telephone Conversations:** Children can often benefit from practicing their telephone etiquette. The Conversation Coach will determine what scenarios would be expected based on the child's age level and "need to know." Some examples might include: ordering restaurant food, requesting information about store hours, requesting information about store merchandise, knowing how to respond to telemarketers or strangers, knowing how to take a message for a parent, and knowing how to engage in a long conversation with grandparents or a friend.

**6. Restaurant Conversations:** Children may benefit from practicing the language and social etiquette for a variety of restaurant scenarios. Some examples might include: how to order a hamburger from a fast food restaurant, how to order a beverage from a busy kiosk, and how to interact with the staff at a family or fine dining restaurant (i.e. hostess, beverage server, waiter).

**7. Excuse Me Conversations:** Children may benefit from practicing scenarios where the use of the phrase, “Excuse Me” would be required. For example, when we want to find an item in a store, we will often do the following steps: Make eye contact, and smile. Say, “Excuse me,” and then make our request. Wait for the information to be provided, and then smile and say, “Thank you.” Other phrases such as “I’m sorry.” or “Pardon me.” might be directly taught through role-playing as well!

**8. Pedestrian Etiquette:** Children may benefit from practicing scenarios to improve their social etiquette and knowledge of safety rules in public situations. These rules are all acts of consideration that we offer to others. For example, when moving through a crowd or walking within close proximity to others, the Conversation Coach may teach the following rules:

- a. **Stay to the right** - In many countries such as Canada and the USA, the normal practice is to walk on the right side of a path to avoid collision with oncoming pedestrians.
- b. **Don’t stop suddenly** - When moving with a crowd, stay with the crowd. If you must stop, make your way to the side and out of the way of the masses. If one fails to follow this rule, it could cause a jam in the pedestrian traffic, make others angry, or cause someone to get injured.
- c. **Make room for others** - Whether on a sidewalk, school hallway or park path, allow others who are moving in the opposite direction enough space. At times, this may mean walking single file.
- d. **Be mindful of your conversations** - Some topics are not meant for others to hear.
- e. **Be aware of your surroundings** - Texting, reading, and talking on the phone all require attention that can take your mind off of where you are walking. This can lead to collisions with other people or with objects.
- f. **Honor the elderly or those with special needs** - Be mindful of those who have more difficulty with movement, and think about what you can do to give them the space that they need.
- g. **Use appropriate phrases** - For example, say, “Excuse me” when walking amongst others. Say “Thank you” when someone holds the door open for you.

**9. Waiting in Line Etiquette:** Children may benefit from role-plays to help them be successful while having to wait in a line up. Some rules that may apply could include the following:

- a. Keep your hands to yourself.
- b. Be mindful not to step on toes and heels of others around you.
- c. Don’t budge in front of others.
- d. Be patient and wait your turn.

**10. Technology Etiquette:** The following suggestions are for Face-to-Face conversations when technology (i.e. cell phone, tablet, gaming device) is present.

- a. **Set the devices aside** - When having a Face-to-Face conversation, avoid the use of technological devices and their distractions (i.e. checking emails, texting or playing a game). Ideally, your devices should be out of sight. Your conversation partner is likely to feel more valued when they are not competing with your devices.
- b. **Choose Face-to-Face conversations when there is a conflict** - Miscommunication can easily occur when we are relying on technology to communicate due to the lack of nonverbal cues. When dealing with sensitive situations, take the time to clarify misunderstandings through Face-to-Face dialogue.

**11. Etiquette for Socially Sensitive Situations:** Children may benefit from practicing scenarios to improve their ability to navigate through socially sensitive situations. These situations require an extra dose of observance so that children can read the room and “Match or Manage” effectively. Some examples would include:

- a. **Attending ceremonies** - Ceremonies such as weddings and funerals often include multiple stages that have different social expectations. There are moments when silence and reverent attention is expected and other times when laughter and the sharing of stories will be warmly received.
- b. **Visiting someone in the hospital** - Appropriate topics of conversation, physical conduct, and patient listening are key components when visiting someone in the hospital.

## TYPES OF SUPPORT PROVIDED

The Conversation Coach and the caregiver will work together to identify and prioritize areas of the child's conversation which require further skill acquisition. A plan for addressing these areas can then be developed. Support may include the following:

1. Fill in the Customized Conversation Checklist. The Customized Conversation Checklist is a form which is typically filled out by the parent(s) and/or other significant caregivers (i.e. teachers). These people are the experts in relation to the child's conversation skills because they are with them on a day to day basis. The informal comments and insights that they provide will help the Conversation Coach plan out which conversation skills need to be targeted. They may be skills which have not been addressed through the CMC program.
2. Make a Conversation Recipe with the child. A Conversation Recipe is like the "directions section" in a cooking recipe. It answers the following questions: Who might have the conversation? Where might it take place? When might it take place? Why might it take place? Whether the recipe is discussed verbally, written in an outline form or drawn with pictures, its intent is to help the child understand the sequence of events and the roles of the participants in a given situation.
3. Write a Conversation Script for the child. A Conversation Script is like the "ingredients section" of a cooking recipe. It describes the actual words/phrases that a child might be expected to say in a given social situation.
4. Do some role plays with the child so that he/she can practice the skill in question within a controlled environment.
5. Plan some specific field trips where the child can do some intensive practice on the skill being targeted. For example, if a child has difficulty asking directions, plan one field trip to focus on just that task.

**Additional activities that the Conversation Coach may engage in at this stage of the program include the following:**

**Attending family/community events:** Occasionally, there may be an opportunity where the child would like the Conversation Coach to attend a special event in his/her life. For example, if the child is presenting at a public speaking event, he/she may ask you to attend. Though schedules do not always allow for this, the coach's presence and support at such events can make a world of difference in the life of a child.

**Advocating for the child:** The Conversation Coach may be asked by the family to provide information to educators or other individuals within the child's life to help them better understand what are realistic or unrealistic goals in relation to the child's social language skills. This type of advocacy can have a strong impact on how others may interact with the child in the future.