

## **Starting a Conversation**

First, identify the person you would like to speak to. If the person you want to talk to is already talking to someone else, especially if it is someone you do not know, or if they are busy



doing a task, it may be better to speak to them later when they are free. If the person is not talking to anyone and is not busy doing anything, stand about 1-1.5 metres away from them, face them and make eye contact, smile politely and say “Hello”.

If you want to start a conversation with someone you don't know, it is polite to begin by saying “hello” and introducing yourself. For example:

- "Hello, my name's Adam. Nice to meet you..."
- "Hi, what's your name? I'm James."

With someone you already know, you can start by saying “Hello” or “Hi” but it is useful to combine this with a question or comment if you want to start a conversation. Otherwise you might simply get a “Hi” in response and then the person may walk away. If you are with a group of people or in a crowded setting, it is useful to use the person's name so that they know you are talking to them, such as saying “Hello James” rather than just “Hello”. For example:

- “Hi Adam, how are you?”
- “Hello, I like your jumper / hair / shoes.”

- “Hi James, how are things?”

Once you have opened by saying “Hello”, you can start to move the conversation forward. It is a good idea to ask some general questions at the beginning of the conversation rather than starting on a specific topic. For example you can ask the person a question relating to the event or place you are at. Examples include:

- (at a party or social event) "How do you know everyone else here?"
- (at work or a work event) "How long have you been working here?"
- (at school, college or university) “What are you studying?”
- “How has your day been?”
- (at an event) “Did you have to travel far to get here?”

You could also move the conversation forward by commenting on the situation, for example:

- "This is a really nice party."
- "The shop is really busy today."
- "The class was very interesting, wasn't it?"
- “It's really warm out today.”

You can try making an observation (such as a compliment) or asking a question about the other person. This shows that you are taking a polite

interest in them and encourages a conversation to develop. For example:

- “What kind of music do you like?”
- "I like your hat. Where did you get it, if you don't mind me asking?"
- (If you're at someone's house) "Wow, you've got a great film collection."
- “Is that a new coat? It's really nice.”

It's important to avoid making compliments about someone's body as this might be misinterpreted as flirting. It is also inappropriate to make comments about certain body parts, such as the breasts, buttocks, armpits, genitals etc.

You can also ask questions about everyday topics outside of the immediate situation you are in, such as light news items, popular films or television programmes, events (such as concerts, gigs etc). For example

- "Have you seen (new popular film)? What did you think of it?"
- "What do you think of (the latest development on a popular TV show)?"
- "You went to that concert last night, right? How was it?"
- "Did you read that article yesterday about....?"
- “How was the hike you went on at the weekend? Where did you walk?”

Questions are useful for starting conversations and keeping them going, but statements about shared interests can also be effective. For example:

- "I'm thinking of seeing (new popular movie). I saw the trailer for it. It looks really good."
- "I've heard that (band or singer you like) is touring this year. I'd really like to go and see them."
- "I read a really interesting article the other day. It was saying that...."

If talking to someone you know, you can ask them for an update on something they have told you about previously. For example, if you know they've been on holiday, you can ask them how their time away was and what they did. Referring like this, to what they have previously told you, shows that you were listening to them the last time you spoke and that you are genuinely interested in their life. Examples include:

- "So how was your weekend up at the cottage?"
- "How is college going?"
- "How's your daughter doing? Has she gotten over her cold yet?"
- "Did you end up buying that game you were talking about? How is it?"

It is not possible to list every possible conversation starter, but these are some basic suggestions that you could begin to think about. Discussing these with someone you feel safe with (e.g. a family member, close friend or support worker) may help you to think of some other ideas. If you are nervous about a social situation, it can also help to write down a few different conversation starters to practice and try to memorise these until you feel more confident conversing freely.