



Teaching Children Greetings and Good-byes

Conversational skills are the foundation for making friends and interacting with adults. Greetings and good-byes are very important aspects of a conversation since greetings set the tone for the conversation and good-byes leave a final impression. This article focuses on the critical components of greetings and good-byes and provides ways to practice these skills.

Tricky Components of Greetings and Good-byes

1. Wordings – Many different words and phrases are used in introductions and greetings. The variations can be confusing for children who have a hard time generalizing skills. For example, “Hello” and “How are you?” for greetings or “Good-bye” and “Bye” for endings. Additionally, less common phrases or more subtle cues can be very difficult to recognize. For example, “I heard the bell,” or “It is getting late.”

2. Context – Children need to understand greetings and good-byes with regards to context. Two main determinates of context are the person being addressed and the setting of the encounter. For example, “Good morning.” and “Hey there!” are both greetings, but they are appropriate for different people. The same can be said for “Have a nice day.” and “See you later!” In addition to judging context with regards to the individual, children must also understand context with regards to settings. For example, a soccer coach may be greeted in a less formal manner than a teacher or an older person in the community.

3. Body Language – A glance from a familiar person, an outstretched hand to shake, and an approaching person are ways people engage conversations. These ‘pre-greeting’ behaviors may be understood naturally by some children but other children may need direct instruction in this area.

Strategies for Teaching Components of Greetings and Good-byes

Include variety- Activities addressing greetings and good-byes should include a variety of wording as well as people and situations. Variety helps children generalize the skills to new settings and people.

Discussions – Prepare children for an upcoming greeting by letting them know what will occur and reminding them how to respond. For example, “I am going to introduce you to our new neighbor. Please remember to say, ‘Hello, nice to meet you.’” If a conversation has occurred that a child had difficulty with, review the situation. For example, “Bobby, I think when Todd picked up his bag he was starting to end the conversation. Next time, ask him if he has to leave.” Additionally, praise children to encourage correct behavior and be sure to say what they did correctly. For example, “Jane, you did a nice job of saying ‘Good morning’ to Mr. Allen.”

Role plays – Have children role play situations with a variety of wording and body language. Be sure to role play with peers and adults and use different words and settings for the role play. Role play is a fun way to teach new phrases, body language cues, and appropriate responses in a comfortable environment.

Games – Use photographs or drawings of people talking to promote group discussions about introductions, body language, appropriate phrases for the person’s age and role, and conversation endings. Take before and after shots or correct and incorrect shots of starting and ending conversations to create a matching game.

Literacy activities – Use drawings of people talking to each other with speech bubbles. Include one person’s greeting or good-bye and have the child complete the other person’s response. Have children write a short story about people meeting for the first time, seeing someone familiar at a store, or leaving for a trip.

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