

Conversation guide for educators

Educators and families can work together to support a child. In taking a child-centred approach, you will be able to draw on the knowledge families have of their child, discuss the observations you have made, and ensure that discussions are positive and productive.

Here are some conversation starters you can use when talking to families. Also included are some prompts you can use to seek further input from families.

Topic 1: Interests

If we know about [child's name]'s interests, we can use these to help your child learn other things and new skills.

What I've noticed about [child's name]'s interests is ...

Further prompts

- Can you tell me what you have noticed at home?
- What does [child's name] enjoy doing the most?
- What is [child's name] interested in talking about?
- What are they curious about or want to know more about?
- What are their favourite things at home?

Topic 2: Social communication

If we understand how [child's name] communicates with adults and other children, it will help us understand what they need.

What I've noticed about how [child's name] communicates is ...

Further prompts

- Can you tell me what happens at home?
- How does [child's name] communicate with you?
- How does [child's name] start conversations with other children?
- How does [child's name] respond to new people who come to your home, including adults?
- How does [child's name] respond to praise?
- How does [child's name] ask for things they want to get or that are out of reach?
- How does [child's name] ask for help?
- How do they let you know when they've had enough and want to do something else?

Topic 3: Play

Once we know how your child spends their free time, we can use play-based activities to build their academic and social skills. We can also plan activities in the classroom and playground that will help them get involved in free play with others.

I've noticed that [child's name]'s favourite activities during break time are ...

Further prompts

- Can you tell me what [child's name] enjoys doing in their free time at home?
- Are there things that they'd rather do on their own?
- What have you noticed about the activities they choose to do on their own?
- Who do they prefer to play with?
- How do they respond to games with others?
- What are their afternoons and weekends like?
- What activities do they enjoy doing with other children?

Topic 4: Response to change

It would really help to know how your child responds to changes at school, such as a new teacher, cancellation of activities or furniture being rearranged in the classroom. If we understand how they feel about change, we can plan for ways to reduce any worry and stress when there are unexpected changes.

What I've noticed about [child's name]'s responses to change is ...

Further prompts

- Does [child's name] have favourite routines or specific ways things must be done?
- How do they move from one activity to another?
- What does [child's name] do when they are asked to stop doing one thing and do something else?
- How do they respond to changes in routine?
- How does [child's name] respond to new activities at home?
- How does [child's name] respond to learning new ways of doing things?

Topic 5: Sensory preferences

It's important for us to know about [child's name]'s sensory preferences and how they respond to sensory stimuli. This will help us design activities that are interesting for them and help them stay on task.

When looking at [child's name]'s sensory preferences, I've noticed ...

Further prompts

- Are there any particular objects [child's name] tends to focus on at home?
- How does [child's name] react to things such as bright light or loud noise?
- Are there other things that you've noticed that trigger a response in [child's name]?
- What activities or routines have a calming effect on [child's name] at home?

Topic 6: Communication of emotions

It would be helpful to know how [child's name] expresses their feelings or emotions so we can understand their behaviour and find out what causes their positive and negative feelings.

When [child's name] expresses excitement (fear, frustration, dislike, feeling good), I've noticed ...

Further prompts

- How does [child's name] show excitement (frustration, dislike, contentment)?
- What makes [child's name] express excitement (fear, frustration, dislike, contentment)?
- What do you do when behaviour escalates, or when [child's name] retreats?

Topic 7: Self-care

Once we know about [child's name]'s self-care strengths and needs, we can help them understand what are socially appropriate routines outside of the classroom.

I've noticed [child's name]'s self-care skills ...

Further prompts

- How does [child's name] get their own food?
- Does your child take any medication that impacts their appetite?
- How does [child's name] respond when they have to change clothes?
- What help does [child's name] need in using the toilet?
- How does [child's name] follow hygiene routines at home?



Resources for educators: <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/topics/autism/starting-school/>