

## The Autism Spectrum & SEN Comic Strip Conversations

### *What are Comic Strip Conversations?*

Comic Strip Conversations are conversations between two or more people which incorporate the use of simple line drawings, providing additional support to individuals who struggle to comprehend the quick exchange of verbal information that occurs in a conversation. Comic Strip Conversations can be used to:

- Report the past
- Describe the present
- Plan the future
- Explore emotions and feelings about situations

Comic Strip Conversations systematically identify what people say and do and emphasise *what people may be thinking*. A set of eight symbols are used to represent basic conversational skills (see below). The drawings can be done on paper, dry-wipe boards, laminated sheets or any other preferred material. In addition, colour may be incorporated to represent the emotional content of statements, thoughts and questions.

Some Comic Strip Conversations provide insights into an individual's perspective of a situation and may serve as pre-requisite activity to the development of Social Stories. In short, Comic Strip Conversations are used to visually 'work through' a problem situation and to identify solutions.

### *Procedure*

**Introduction** – In most cases the activity is introduced with an attitude of acceptance, demonstrating that drawing while talking is a good way to communicate. Support staff, parents or other adults involved in having Comic Strip Conversations should ensure that they are confident with using this approach to avoid any clumsiness, self-consciousness or uncertainty. Ultimately, Comic Strip Conversations should be introduced by someone who is confident and supportive.

**Gaining Participation** - The individual should take the lead in a Comic Strip Conversation and the parent/professional should guide without assuming the lead. Instead, the individual is assisted in understanding and expressing ideas in a conversation and they are encouraged to do the majority of the drawing/writing.

**Symbols Dictionary** - During Comic Strip Conversations a specific dictionary of symbols will be used and this will contain the standard Comic Strip Conversation symbols and a set of personal symbols, which can be added to over the course of conversations. The standardised dictionary includes eight symbols for basic conversation concepts including;

- Listening
- Listen (as part of a group)
- Interrupting
- Loud
- Quiet
- Talk
- Everyone talking at once
- Thoughts

The personal element of the dictionary may include symbols for specific people, places and concepts that are relevant to the individual. Symbols used should remain consistent so that their meaning remains the same each time they are used. It might be a good idea to save symbols in a special folder to refer to each time a Comic Strip Conversation takes place. Equally, it is a good idea for previous Comic Strip Conversations to be available for discussion and going over previous events and conversations.

**Beginning a Conversation** - Comic Strip Conversations begin where all conversations begin – with small talk. Initial topics may be regarded as irrelevant, but they will illustrate how typical conversations begin, e.g. asking about the weather, what happened at the weekend, etc.

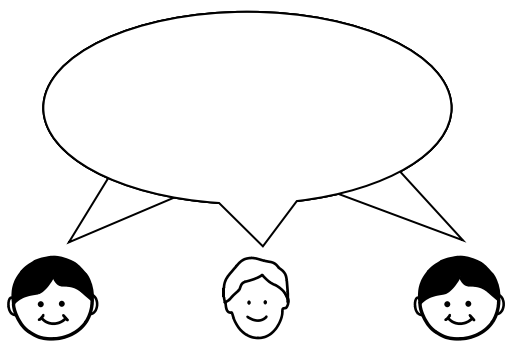
**The Targeted Topic** - Once small talk is completed then the topic of conversation can be introduced and this will usually be a situation that is giving the individual some difficulty. The parent/professional should guide the individual's drawings with questions, e.g. 'where were you?' or statements (if the individual requires more direct encouragement), e.g. 'draw the people who were with you'.

Information should be gathered during the conversation, helped by the questioning of the parent/professional. Perspectives on what has been discussed can be shared so long as this is done sympathetically and supportively. Individuals may also require guiding support in order to relay events sequentially and without becoming too cluttered.

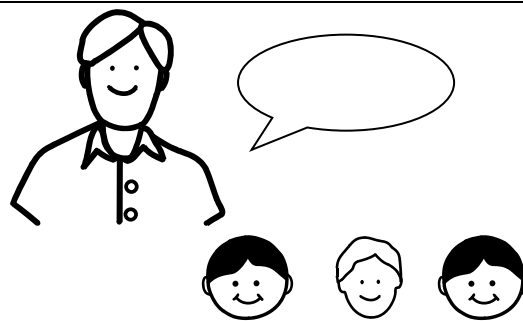
**Summarising a Conversation** - Conversations should be summarised before solutions are identified and key points in the conversation should be reviewed to ensure clarity.

**Conclusion of a Conversation** - To conclude a Comic Strip Conversation the individual should attempt to identify a solution to the situation or, (if it is too difficult for the individual to suggest a solution), to listen to a suggested solution. Solutions are also drawn and/or written and the individual should be asked if they can help in adding other possible solutions. From the final list the individual can develop a 'Plan', looking at the pros and cons of each suggestion, for what to do if the situation occurs again.

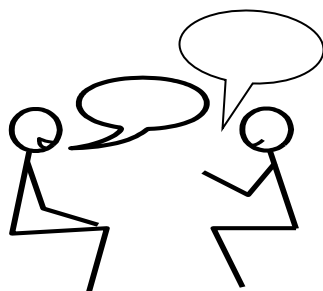
*Based on Comic Strip Conversations, Gray (2003)*



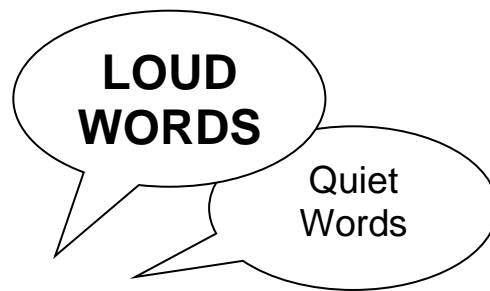
Everyone Talking at Once



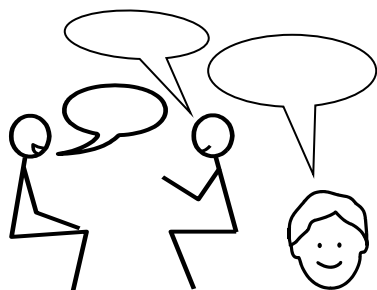
Listen (as part of a group)



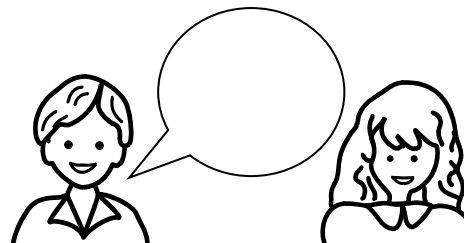
Interrupt (when someone is still talking)



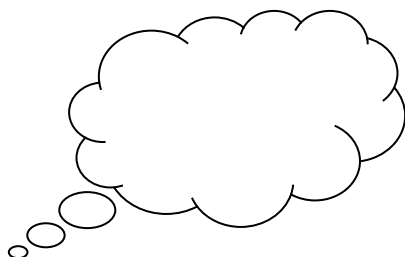
Loud or Quiet Words



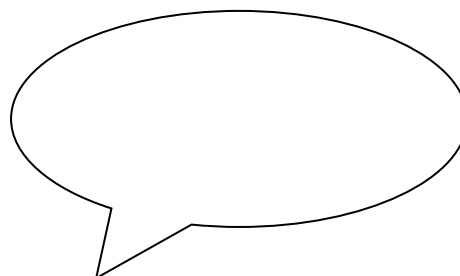
Interrupt (when two people are already talking)



Listen



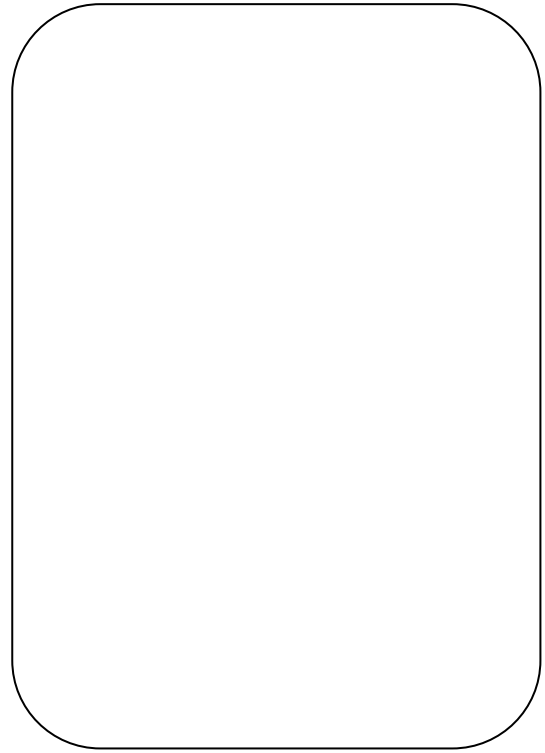
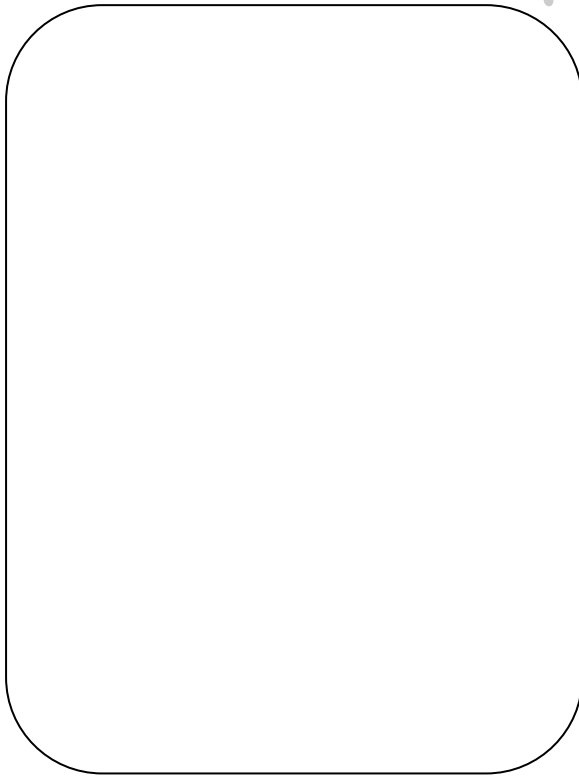
Thoughts (what people think)



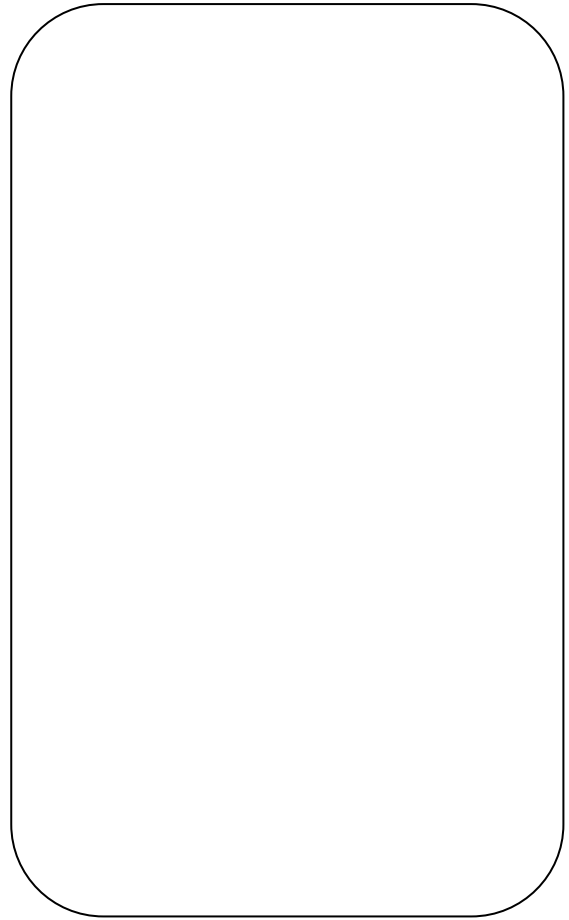
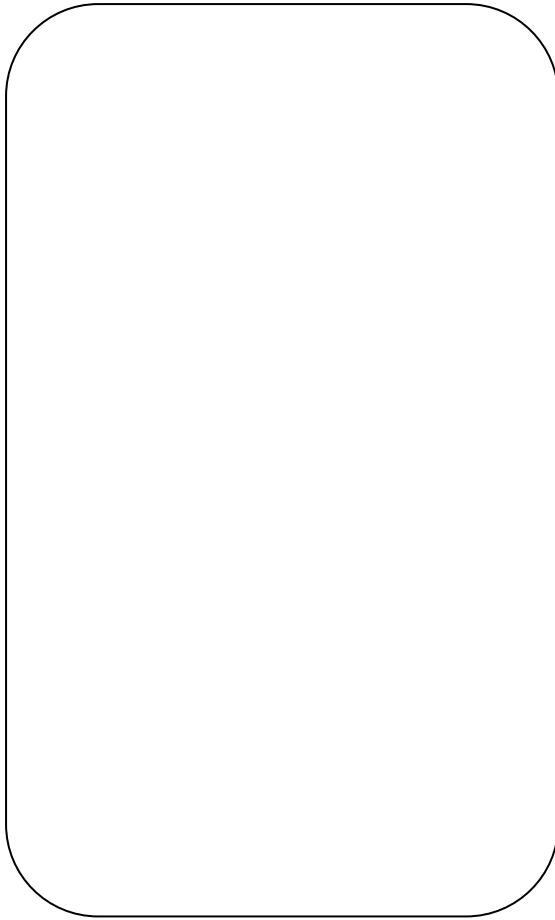
Talk (words people say)

## Personal Symbols Dictionary

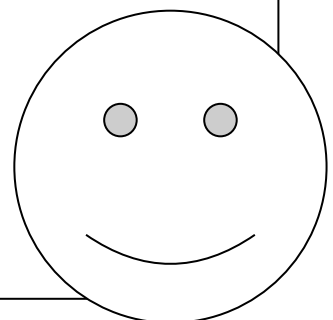

# Comic Strip Converser



Then what happened?



What could I do next time?



For Photocopying, cutting & sticking

