



# Communication & Social Skills Toolkit

April 2021

## Skill 6 Greetings

### What are greetings?

Greetings are an essential aspect of how we communicate with other people. Sometimes these greetings are part of quick social exchanges as we pass people in a hallway. At other times, greetings are a way to initiate a longer conversation. We all use a variety of informal and formal greetings in our day to day life. Some greetings might include:

- Good morning!
- Hello! How are you today?
- Hi!
- Hey!
- What's up?
- A simple smile, nod, or even a raised hand
- A high five

### Why is this skill important to teach?

First and foremost, greetings are a way of connecting, even briefly, with others. For example, some greetings are an automatic response such as when we walk through the hallway and pass other people. The people we encounter might be strangers, but a simple smile, nod, or raised hand is a friendly way of briefly acknowledging someone. In some situations, we might also say a quick, "Good morning!" as we pass each other. Other times, the exchange starts with a greeting but then continues towards a more in-depth and more meaningful conversation.

### Why are greetings difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Children with ASD often have difficulty interacting with others. This can mean difficulty playing with others but can also include difficulty participating in any kind of back and forth exchange. When you think about it, greetings are really the first step in a back and forth exchange. Without the use of such greetings, a person might be considered standoffish, or in some cases, rude. Ultimately, not using greetings could make developing more meaningful relationships difficult.

## What are some considerations for teaching a child to use greetings?

Greeting another person is more than just the words we use such as “Hi!” or “Good morning!” Greetings also include a lot of body language, tone of voice, and facial expression. After all, I can say “Good morning” in a way that indicates maybe I’m not actually have a very good morning! If I say “Good morning” in a down and dejected manner, someone might respond with “Are you ok? What’s wrong?” This is important to understand because some children with ASD struggle with changing their tone of voice or their body language for different situations. The child with ASD might say “Good morning” in a tone of voice that doesn’t match the interaction and can cause confusion for everyone. In teaching a child how to greet others, it will be important to consider how we greet another person with our bodies, our facial expressions, and our voices.

Next, the child with ASD may need help understanding that different people require different greetings. After all, the way we greet our bosses is very different from how we greet our best friend! Greeting others is a skill that requires a child to understand when to use a more formal greeting such as, “Good morning, Mr. Thompson!” and when to use an informal, “Yo, dude! What’s up?” with a high-five. While adults might not always like the lingo that young children use with each other, it is important to teach children with ASD to interact as others in their age group would in order to promote inclusion and friendships.

Before starting, it’s also important to take into account how your child communicates. Some children with ASD use Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or even a device that speaks when a button is pushed. Other children with ASD can use some verbal speech but need support by using cue cards with a word and/or picture or by using a sentence strip or choice board with different options for greetings, questions, and comments. Be sure the child has the vocabulary they need to participate in any activity.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items for greetings:

- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports of items or cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Social Narratives and Role-Playing

- Create or use a prepared social narrative about how to initiate and respond to greetings. A social narrative is a simple, short story that explains what something means and why it is important. Social narratives can be an effective strategy for helping a child with ASD understand what to do and why they should do something a certain way. An example of a social narrative about greetings at school might include:

- A set up of a situation (When I am at school...)
  - Different times to use greetings at school:
    1. Passing a classmate in the hallway
    2. Greeting friends on the playground
    3. Greeting a teacher in the classroom
  - Different ways to greet people
    1. Make eye contact, smile, and nod
    2. Wave hi
    3. Use a formal, "Good morning, Mrs. Smith!"
    4. Use an informal, "Hey, what's up!"
  - Explain what others may do in response
  - Explain why greetings are so important (being friendly vs. rude etc...)
  - Some children need a very personalized social narrative that includes pictures of them at school, their classmates, and their teacher.
- Read the story together.
- Now, role-play how to greet others at school in different situations (on the bus, on the playground, in the hallway, and yes, even the bathroom!)
- Be sure to include the expressions, body language, and tone of voice from the first activity during your role-playing!
- This activity can also be video recorded so the child can learn from watching the video again and again. This is called video modeling. Video modeling is an effective strategy for teaching a child what to do and how to do it.

## Activity #2 Use Routines for Practicing Greetings

- Once a child has an understanding of how greetings work and why they are important, incorporate greetings into daily routines such as in the morning when you wake a child up, at the breakfast table with other family members, while out running errands, and at the park or playground.
- Consider expanding a child's options for greeting others. The social narrative in Activity #1 may only have a few examples of when to greet someone and a possible way to do it. There are many ways to help a child know what other greetings they can use, including:
  - Adding different greetings to a child's AAC system (picture exchange, vocabulary on devices, etc...)
  - Create a choice board with different greetings. You can also use a whiteboard with different greeting posted on it.
  - Create sentence strips with different formal and informal options for greeting others.
- Be sure the child has access to their AAC system, choice boards / whiteboards, cue cards, and sentence strips throughout the day.
- Practice greeting during natural routines. Start by initiating the greeting first. For example, at breakfast say, "Good morning, Josiah!"

- Wait about 5 seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child responds with their own greeting, you can keep the conversation going by asking, “How are you today?”
- If the child does not respond, you can prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to a cue card, sentence strip of whiteboard with greetings
  - Pointing to the appropriate vocabulary in a picture exchange system or on a communication device
  - Start the sentence by saying “How are \_\_\_ and waiting to see if the child fills in the rest
- Practice these greetings with different family members, friends, and community members as you go about your daily routines. Be sure to model appropriate greetings as well. Children learn a lot by watching their caregivers!

### Activity #3 Teaching the body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions used with greetings.

- This activity will help children understand that greeting a person is more than just the words. Before starting, make sure children who use AAC, cue cards, or sentence strips have access to the appropriate vocabulary for different feelings.
- Start the activity by showing a child different pictures of a person who is sad, mad, bored, and excited and labeling them.
- Then practice with each emotion by imitating the photo. For example, a sad person might walk with their shoulders down, their head drooping, with the corners of their mouth drawn downward. Do this together in front of a mirror so the child can see the photo, see how you demonstrate the emotion, and notice any differences in how they express the emotion.
- Now, add in a tone of voice that matches the emotion in the picture. For a sad face, use a depressed tone to say, “Hi” (think of how Eeyore would say hi).
- Change it up to the next emotion and practice saying Hi while mad or irritated. This will help the child see the differences in their body, their face, and their voice.
- The next time you practice this activity, use a different greeting (both formal and informal) so the child knows what each one sounds like for different emotions.
- It may also help to record video of you and your child practicing this skill. Remember, video modeling is an effective strategy in showing a child with ASD how to do something!

### Social Skill Extension Activity

- Now that a child has an understanding of how to express different greetings to a wide variety of people in different situations, a child can work on more complex and subtle challenges to greeting others. After a child practices what different emotions look like and how these emotions can change a person’s body language, facial expression, and tone of voice, now a child must know what to do when they see that in others. In other words, if their friend walks up and is obviously very sad, it wouldn’t match the situation for the child

to give a high five and excitedly say, “Hey dude, how’s it going!” The child will have to learn to recognize emotions in others and perhaps change up their own approach to a greeting based on what they see. When seeing their obviously sad friend, the child must slow down and rethink that excited high five to include a hand on the shoulder as they gently say, “Hey, are you ok?” Understand that this is a complex skill for children with ASD so remember that this will take A LOT of practice.

- Start by writing a social narrative that discusses how to change your greeting based off how someone else is feeling. Make sure your social narrative talks about what different emotions might look like and things a child might notice in others who are mad, sad, bored, uninterested, and more (clenched fists and drawn eyebrows for mad, slumped and head hung low for sad, looking at a watch or trying to walk away for uninterested, etc...). Talk about changing their approach based on what the child notices.
- Create a choice board or use a whiteboard with different types of greetings. Have a greeting for an obviously sad friend, a mad friend, an excited friend, etc...
- Start the activity by reading the social narrative together.
- Next, show the child their choices for different greetings on the choice board or whiteboard.
- Now, role-play different scenarios that include different emotions with different body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- Have the child practice varying their approach to a greeting based on what they see.
- If the child appears stuck and doesn’t know what to say, you can prompt them by pointing to the correct option on the choice board.
- Continue practicing this skill with other family members when they walk in the door. Remind the child to look for cues and change their approach based off what they see!

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q & A: Providing Choices  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>
- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>

