

## Skill 9 Saying Goodbye

### What does saying goodbye mean?

Saying goodbye is a natural part of our conversations with other people. On one level, saying goodbye is simply part of a polite exchange. However, saying goodbye is also a way to end a conversation. Some ways to end a conversation might include:

- Goodbye!
- Have a good day!
- I'll see you later!
- Bye!
- Later!
- A head tilt or a wave

### Why is this skill important to teach?

While saying goodbye can just be good manners, it is also a way to effectively end an interaction. However, there is more to it than just saying goodbye when one individual is finished with the conversation. Think about it this way, when two people are having a conversation, there is a back and forth nature to the interaction. One person speaks while the other listens. As the conversation winds down, the language starts to change to things like, "Well, I've got to get going. I have class in a few minutes. It was good to see you!" The other person might reply with a "Yes, good to see you too! I'll see you later!" In this transition to ending a conversation, each person also displays body language that conveys the need to go. For example, one person might look at their watch or look down the hall as if to indicate that they really need to get moving. Now consider what it would be like if the person you were talking to just up and left mid-sentence. That kind of interaction would be jarring and would cause a lot of confusion. It would also be considered very rude. As you can see, saying goodbye is more than just a common phrase, it helps up maintain relationships with others!

### Why is saying goodbye difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Due to the characteristics of ASD, some children can struggle with the act of communicating. This child might struggle to even participate in the back and forth exchange of information, and then not be able to independently communicate a goodbye. Other children with ASD can speak quite

clearly and have large vocabularies, but struggle greatly with social skills. This child with ASD might try to participate in the conversation but then simply walk away when they were done sharing what was important leaving the other person wondering what just happened. It's not that the child with ASD is purposefully rude and uncaring. It's just that the child with ASD doesn't know how to end a conversation or why that it is important to do so with a goodbye or see you later. In both of these situations, a child with ASD would have a difficult time developing and maintaining friendships.

## What are some considerations for teaching a child to say goodbye?

Teaching a child with ASD to say goodbye will involve more than just teaching them how to say the words. Conversations have a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is a back and forth nature to them as each person takes a turn sharing information, commenting, or asking and answering questions. Conversations also include nonverbal communication such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. Some considerations for this skill include:

- Teach the child with ASD to watch the body language of the other person. Is the person looking at their watch or off into the distance as if distracted or trying to convey that they need to go soon? Conversely, the child with ASD will also need to understand what their own nonverbal communication is saying to others. Does their facial expression convey boredom or a lack of interest or are they inadvertently displaying the wrong body language for the situation?
- Teach the child to know when to wrap up a conversation and say goodbye. This is more of an artform than a science so it will take a lot of practice to know when a conversation can be quick or when a conversation may need a little more time to unfold before ending it and saying goodbye.
- Teach the child different ways to communicate goodbye. There are formal and informal ways to end a conversation, depending on the situation and people involved. A child might tell his close friends, "Later, dude!" But the same child would tell his teacher, "Have a good day! I'll see you tomorrow!" Knowing when and how to use different language to match the situation can be tricky for children with ASD and can take a lot of practice! While adults may not always care for the language that children use informally, it will help promote inclusion and support friendships if we teach a child with ASD to use the same words and phrases that their age group uses in conversations.

Before starting, it's also important to take into account how a 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 for teaching a child how to ask for items / people / or activities:

- Social narrative, or short story, that tells a child with ASD what to do, how to do it, and why it is important. A social narrative about saying goodbye should include information about different ways to say goodbye to different groups of people and in different situations but should also include information about nonverbal communication such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions.
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- Choice board for topics to discuss during the conversation or for choices on different ways to say goodbye.
- 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: Practice the Nonverbal Parts of Saying Goodbye

- Read a social narrative together on saying goodbye. Make sure the social narrative includes information about body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- First, practice identifying different facial expressions. This can be done with pictures but also with videos from TV or movies. If starting with pictures, you can begin with pictures that are labeled with sad, mad, bored, interested facial expressions. Practice making the face as you label different pictures. While watching a video, pause the show and ask the child to identify what type of facial expression the person is using. Some of these may be complicated than the pictures and may include things like 'in love' or 'disgusted' or 'irritated.' Watch how facial expressions play a role in how people end their conversations and say goodbye in different situations. For example, if someone is sad, it's unlikely that the other person uses an excited, happy expression when ending the conversation.
- Next, practice different ways to use body language during a conversation. This can include things like crossing your arms while someone is talking, putting a hand on your chin to indicate thinking, or even tilting a head to indicate confusion and nodding along as if to agree. Body language can also include things like knowing how far or how close to stand to someone else during a conversation and while saying goodbye. Finally, practice things like using a nod or a wave when saying goodbye. These are all elements that add to how a conversation unfolds and ends!
- Next, practice different ways to use tone of voice. A person can say goodbye in a variety of ways that indicate anger or irritation, sarcasm, happiness, and even boredom. A child with ASD may

inadvertently use the wrong tone of voice while saying goodbye and the other person might be hurt or confused as the interaction ends. Take several different phrases besides just goodbye and try saying them in different ways. For example:

- Gotta go. See you later.
- I'm outta here! Bye!
- I'm running late. Catch you later!
- Nice to see you.

- It's important to note that some children with ASD struggle with slang and idioms and may take certain words and phrases literally. Be sure to explain to help the child understand that catch you later doesn't mean actually catching someone, but rather, is just a way to say I'll catch up and talk with you later.

## Activity #2: Roleplay the Pacing and Ending of a Conversation

- Understanding how to pace a conversation and end it in an appropriate way is more of an artform than a science. There is no hard and fast rule to handling every conversation and knowing how and when to steer the conversation to its conclusion. This skill will take a lot of practice and it will be important to role-play different scenarios so the child has options to consider when trying to say goodbye. Start this activity by reading a social narrative that includes information about how some conversations are short, some are long, and some are boring and you want them to end but you don't want to hurt the other person's feelings.
- Next, roleplay different types of conversations. Start with the quick hi and goodbye that you might see in the hallway while passing a peer and / or a teacher. Remind the child that if the person stops and turns toward you, that indicates that they might want to stop and chat for a second. Practice polite ways to end the conversation quickly when in a hurry.
- Next, practice a longer conversation that has several turns where each person asks a question, answers a question, and comments about different things. Practice different ways to end that conversation depending on if it is a peer and informal or a teacher or other adult and a more formal situation.
- Finally, practice more awkward conversations such as ones where it's hard to get the conversation to end or a conversation you don't really want to engage in. It can be hard to know what to do in these situations so provide some options for 'getting out' such as:
  - I'm sorry, I can't talk right now. Can we chat later?
  - I know this is really important to you but I have a lot of work to do right now. Can we finish this conversation later?
  - I'm really busy. I'll catch you tomorrow?
- This allows the child to remove themselves from a conversation that makes them uncomfortable in a polite way. It also allows the child to regroup, consider their options for handling the situation, and even get some advice from family or friends on what to do if there's any confusion. Remember, these are all really challenging social communication skills and it will take a lot of practice for the child with ASD!

## Social Skill Extension Activity:

- Once a child has learned and practiced some of the more basic and advanced components to ending a conversation, now it's time to try these skills out with other people and in other environments. Using this skill with others and in other settings will help generalize this skill and improve independence.
- First, go over a social narrative on how to greet and say goodbye to different people such as family members versus friends versus teachers. You can also include how to greet and say goodbye to people out in the community such as someone they see every day like the mailman versus strangers at the store such as a cashier.
- Role-play different ways to greet and say goodbye for these situations. Remember to practice nonverbal communication and different phrases!
- Next, while out in the community, model different forms of greetings and goodbyes such as a hug to a grandparent, a high five to the neighbor's child, and a polite head nod and wave to the cashier.
- Finally, have the child practice what they've learned! If you notice any unique challenges such as trying to hug a stranger, be sure to include when to hug and when not to in a social narrative and practice other ways to say goodbye in those situations.

## 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>