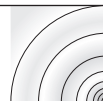# Introduction

Conversation Basics and Beyond: Functional Activities for Teens and Adults with ASD is a workbook of strategic activities to provide a framework for developing functional conversation skills. The materials are intended to be used as lesson plans for individual- and group-therapy activities for individuals exhibiting an intermediate or advanced level of basic communication expression.

The focus of these myriad activities is to combine the elements of communication intents (e.g., inquiring, requesting, self-informing, commenting, expressing opinions) across various place and situational contexts—or integrated with conversational topic ideas—to create conversation turns and complete conversation scripts. The use of visual maps that can be used as the basis for conversational role-playing becomes more prevalent as the hierarchy of activities advances. The strategies themselves involve recall or anticipation of familiar events and integrate role-play in the context of past, present, and future encounters. The topics presented are varied and intended to provide a rich and engaging experience for both instructor and student. Most topics and situations reflect real-life experiences, but many are less familiar, or even imagined, to stretch cognitive thinking.

Situations included in the book are designed to train individuals to take the viewpoint of others, as well as to determine what to say and how to say it in order to build meaningful conversation turns. As a result, the activities firmly support the development of theory of mind, including building empathy and perspective taking. With guidance, your students will gain skills that will result in the ability to appropriately and effectively talk with others regarding a wide range of daily events, topics, and ideas.

Who Is This Book For?

Any material of this type that teaches social skills has an inherent target population of those on the autism spectrum. Specifically, *Conversation Basics and Beyond* is appropriate for older children and adolescents through adult-level individuals with high-functioning autism. Other target groups include individuals with adult-onset aphasia, at-risk teens, young adults with emotional disorders, adults with cognitive impairments associated with the beginning stages of dementia, adolescents and adults with psychological and psychiatric disorders receiving psychotherapy and counseling, and individuals who are English Language Learners (ELL).

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How This Book Is Organized

Three distinct sections make up this workbook and present skills in a hierarchy, beginning with foundational expressive-language skills, and advancing through complete turn-taking conversation simulations.

Part 1: Basic Conversation Equations

Simple personal expressions and single conversation turns are encouraged in Part 1. Beginning with expressing a personal favorite and advancing through navigating complete conversation turns, individuals will begin to build the foundation of adding content to a meaningful conversation.

Part 2: Extended Conversation Equations

Communication intents are deeply explored in this section with the goal of training an individual to mine many aspects of a topic as fuel for meaningful conversation. This section concludes with the challenge to express points of view before, during, and after a situation to build cognitive and critical-thinking skills.

Part 3: Advanced Conversation Equations

The book culminates with higher-level cognitive considerations, including determining missing information and expressing emotional and physical reactions to situations. The final portion of this section contains a variety of conversation maps and topics to encourage conversation preparation, role-play, and repetitive contextual practice.

Our greatest hope—and our motivation for creating this resource—is that the material within will help you build the skills of your students/clients so that they may enrich their lives with one of the most rewarding and enjoyable of all human activities: the art of conversation.

Larry and Paul