# Comic Strip Conversations

A technique developed by Carol Gray (Social Stories) which can:

- provide children/young people with a way of representing an event without overloading with language.
- show how an event developed
- visually and explicitly represent otherwise 'hidden' or abstract elements
- provide a way to begin to develop the concept of what other people might be thinking/ feeling

Useful for:

- unpicking situations
- preparing for new situations
- 'rewinding' and looking at what could have been done differently to give a different outcome
- considering motivations
- describing emotions
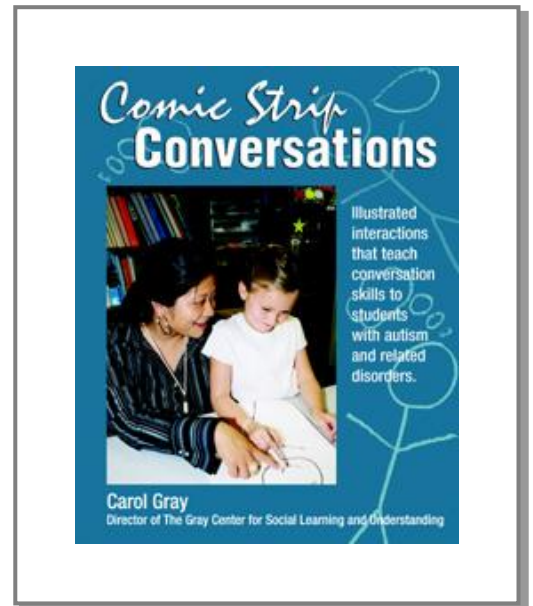
- Starting point for individual children/young people who will develop their own style of conversation: conversation 'belongs' to the student.
- Eight basic symbols to represent conversational skills.
- Use of colour to depict the emotional content of conversation.

Materials:

- Paper and pencil – cheap, easy and always available! Can keep as permanent record. Cannot easily change drawings made in colour which may interrupt the smooth flow of developing a conversation.
- Whiteboards and pens – flexible, can be erased and changed. Photocopy to keep. May need to erase previous work to continue.

Recommended Procedure:

- Introduce to the children/young people in a matter of fact manner, drawing while you talk is OK.
- The conversation may take the form of an interview at the start but work towards the student taking the lead.
- The adult may ask or draw questions to assist in the understanding and expression of ideas.

- Start with 'small talk' in the same way that you would begin a regular conversation (weather symbols are easy to draw!).

Drawing a Given Situation:
- Once settled, locate the setting for the situation and draw a small symbol in the top left hand corner.
- The adult asks questions to support information gathering about the situation:
  Where are you?
  Who else is here?
  What are you doing?
  What happened?
  What did you say?
  What did others say?
  What did you think when you said that?
  What did others think when they said that?
- Return control of the drawing to the child/young person as soon as possible.
- Need to balance gathering insights into the child/young person's perspective with sharing accurate social information.
- When a child/young person cannot answer a difficult question (about another's feelings or thoughts) an answer can be provided.
- If child/young person's perspective may be inaccurate another idea can be introduced without discrediting the child/young person's thoughts.

Structure:
- The use of boxes may help child/young person to sequence events.
- Numbers can be used to reorganise the sequence if necessary, or they can be cut up and re-organised/ or overlaid with post-its

Summary:
- Before developing a solution, summarise the key points.
- The child/young person may be able to summarise the situation independently or point to the relevant parts of the conversation as they are mentioned.
- The summary pulls things together and emphasises important aspects of the situation.

New Solutions:
- The child/young person identifies a new solution to the situation, if not able to then one can be suggested.
- The idea is put into writing and the child/young person asked to add any other solutions to the list.
- The child/young person then creates a plan with possible pros and cons for each solution discussed.
- Some solutions can be rejected and the remaining ideas numbered or listed in the order in which they will be tried.
- The child/young person can be encouraged to develop a mindmap to help devise a plan, using symbols and pictures.
- If the child/young person is unable to identify solutions / develop a plan use the insights gathered regarding the students perspective when developing a behaviour plan / social story.
- IMPORTANT! Ensure language is flexible – child/young person must not expect conversation in reality to be exactly as drawn.

<u>Feelings and Colour:</u>

- Colour is used in the comic strip conversation to depict emotion and motivation behind an interaction.
- children/young people may wish to develop their own use of colour but ensure all understand what each one represents
- Colours are gradually introduced one at a time over the course of several conversations.
- They should naturally appear with the professional introducing a colour as the child/young person is discussing a feeling.
- Feelings of conflict can be depicted by use of two or more colours in a phrase.